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Short Stories.

No. 727. For the Week Ending December 6th, 1902. One Penny.

ASTOUNDING SOCIETY REVELATIONS. BEGIN TO-DAY.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

CRAWLEY DRUMMOND. Lady Peggy's old friend and adviser.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DUCHESS OF EASTACRES. His mother.

LORD REGINALD DAVENANT. Another of Belinda's suitors.

LADY HONORIA. The Duke's sister.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister, who is staying at Cairo.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

HOW LADY PEGGY FINDS BELINDA.

Lady Peggy undertakes, for the sum of twenty thousand pounds, to chaperon Belinda, and to marry her to a son of some old and titled family. Staying at the same hotel in Cairo are the Duke of Eastacres and his mother, the Duchess. Lady Peggy and the Duchess agree that nothing could be better than a union of the Duke's title and Belinda's millions; everything is therefore done to bring this about. One evening, under the guidance of a fine looking Bedouin, they all go to witness a religious festival. They manage to arouse the wrath of the fanatics, but are delivered by the dragoman, who turns out to be David Carr. Belinda signifies her gratitude by publicly hugging him.

The dragoman is dismissed, and back at the hotel the Duchess of Eastacres takes Lady Peggy to task for the occurrence. Lady Peggy retorts that not long ago she saw the Duchess' own daughter Honoria in the arms of a real Egyptian. The Duchess is furious, calls Honoria, and after storming at her, is slapping her face when Belinda rushes in, rescues Honoria and takes her to her room. Shortly afterwards a fearful shriek is heard, followed by an impassioned appeal for "Help!" The voice is Belinda's!

Rushing upstairs, we discover that Belinda has just prevented Honoria from poisoning herself.

The next evening, Lady Peggy discovers the Duke of Eastacres and a new comer, Stanley Forbes, about to fight a duel. Realising the possible disastrous consequences to her matrimonial plans for Belinda, Lady Peggy rushes forward and places herself between the two men.

Sending Eastacres off on some errand, she takes Forbes aside, and after telling him she knows that the quarrel is connected with a girl named Sheila Kenwyn, whose whereabouts Forbes wants to find out, promises to extract the address from Eastacres if Forbes will forego a scandal. Forbes consents.

Lady Peggy then finds Eastacres and refuses to allow his suit with Belinda till he gives her the address. Eastacres gives it.

Later on Lady Peggy is rewarded by discovering Belinda in the Duke's arms.

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Belinda Falls Into a Trap.

At that, the psychological moment, I appeared upon the scene.

"Dear me," said I, "this is very unexpected." And I glanced from one to the other in benignant surprise. "However, I suppose I must not scold—congratulations would be more to the point, eh, Belinda?"

For a moment she made no comment, but stood with flushed cheeks, her breath coming and going in little pants. She had retired some distance from the Duke. Then with an abruptness mightily disconcerting, she turned to Eastacres, and, in a passion of anger, touched with tears, cried:

"Oh, *how* I hate you!"

"*Belinda!* What ever are you thinking of?" I gasped. "What *do* you mean?"

"He's horrid," she said defiantly, "rude and ungentlemanly. I'm not going to marry him. I will never marry him, I hate him," and with that she stamped, yes, actually stamped her foot.

"Belinda," I said gravely, "your conduct calls for explana-

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tion. If you are not engaged to the Duke, how do you account for your—your attitude a moment since?"

"It's not my fault," replied the girl, with flaming cheeks.

"The Duke asked me to be his wife. I said I wouldn't do that, as, though I liked him—so I did *then*—I didn't care enough to marry him. I suggested we'd better be friends instead, and gave him my hand, and he, he—you saw yourself what he did," she concluded wrathfully.

"Lady Carstairs," interposed the Duke, "permit me a few words of explanation. I made Miss North a proposal of marriage, as she tells you. She did not return me a decided answer—in words. Something she said about looking upon me as a friend, and then—with what I took for a charming gesture of compliance—put her hand in mine. Am I to be blamed if I misread her meaning?"

"Not in the least, Duke," I said emphatically. "Belinda will be the first to see that, when she is quieter. At present she is excited, overwrought. To-morrow she will appreciate the position, and will express her sense of the honour you have done her."

"I shall say then as I say now," cried the girl, "I will have nothing more to do with him."

Eastacres, I think, was about to expostulate, but at a sign from me, kept back his remonstrance, and with much tact slipped out of the door.

I and my charge were left alone.

For the first few minutes Belinda seemed to doubt whether to rage or weep. The tears were very near her eyes, and her hands were tightly clenched. Finally, however, defiance came to her aid, and in a spirit of bravado, she perched herself on the table and began to whistle!

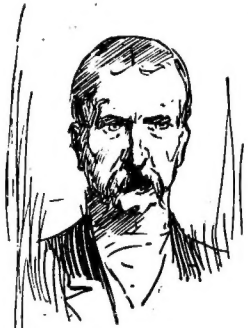
Finding that this unladylike conduct left me untouched, she shortly desisted.

"Lady Peggy," she said at last, "why should you blame me instead of the Duke for what has happened? You should be angry with him, not me."

"I am not aware that the Duke addressed you other than courteously," I returned. "You, on the contrary, spoke to him in the rudest possible manner. You have been guilty of an outrage on good taste, not to say good feeling."

"I am sorry you think that. Perhaps I shouldn't have said he was horrid, but—but—Oh, Lady Peggy, how could you think I meant to marry him?"

"I mistook you for a girl of refined perceptions," I said grimly. "I didn't think you would encourage a man, as you have encouraged the Duke, unless you had some intention of marrying him. Had I known you to be a girl of that description I would never have taken charge of you. As it is you have deceived me, insulted my friend, and hopelessly compromised yourself. I was not the only one who saw the Duke's embrace, and what preceded it. To-morrow, unless your engagement to Eastacres is announced—you will be looked on as an immodest, forward girl, you will be laughed at by the men, and cut by the women. Society doesn't permit conduct like yours to go unpunished. You are a young girl, remember, and as such the least suggestion of lightness or impropriety will be fatal to your social career; I do not see, indeed, how I can continue to act as your chaperon."



THE DUKE OF EASTACRES

Belinda's face grew white.

"I didn't mean to encourage him, Lady Peggy," she said. "At first, indeed, I didn't like him, but when he was so nice to Honoria I changed my opinion, and after he'd saved me from falling down that horrid place in the pyramid, I felt quite friendly. I enjoyed going out with him. He can ride splendidly and he doesn't talk so badly."

"You accepted his attentions, and encouraged his hopes to gratify your vanity. Is that it?"

She shook her head. "I felt friendly, that was all. I've had men friends before now—lots of them."

Her coolness nettled me.

"What you may or may not have done in the backwoods of Australia has no bearing on the case," I said sharply. "You are not among savages now, but living under civilised conditions, and these conditions prohibit a girl from tolerating familiarities—such as you have permitted from the Duke—unless she is going to marry the man,"

"I didn't know," said Belinda despondently. Then, "I think Society is horrid," she went on with renewed vigour. "If a girl can't be nice to a man without nasty things being said of her."

"It's idle to rail against Society," I observed. "You can't change it. If you live in it you must conform to its usages, or"—I paused—"go under in disgrace." I spoke coldly, almost contemptuously; the girl looked distressed, a dim sense of the enormity of which she had been guilty stole upon her. She was gradually verging to a state of mind favourable to my influence.

"What shall I do, Lady Peggy?" she asked wistfully, which was exactly what I wanted her to ask.

"I can't tell. I'm too upset, too grieved to decide. I really think the best thing will be for me to cable to your father, and ask for advice." She flushed, I gazed at her fixedly. "Your father has such a keen sense of honour, he's so upright, so just a man. I shouldn't suppose he knew the meaning of double-dealing. His actions are the outcome of his intentions. He——"

"*Don't*," said Belinda piteously, "please, you mustn't cable, Lady Peggy," she went on earnestly. "I've got myself into this fix, and I must find my own way out of it." She stood up with an air of resolution, and gave herself a little shake. "I suppose I'd better apologise to the Duke?" she said, "to commence with."

"*The Duke*," I repeated, "it's not he I am thinking of. It's *you*. Don't you understand, you foolish and unhappy girl, that you've furnished such an occasion for scandal as Society will not readily let slip? Do you or do you not realise that within the last month you have more or less publicly embraced two men? The first was a mere outsider. As such Society could afford to ignore your behaviour. The Duke of Eastacres is a different matter. Belinda"—I paused—"your reputation is at stake. I cannot, I will not countenance a girl whose name is a bye-word."

"And yet," she said indignantly, "you cheerfully accept Mrs. Murchison-Lee, and she's a married woman."

"And, therefore, exempt from the criticism applied to young girls. Society has one law for married women and another for the young girls."

"It's shameful," cried Belinda.

"You're going from the point," I reminded her. "If you don't like Society, leave it. I will cable to that effect to Mr. North if you desire. If you elect to remain in Society, however, you must conform to its usages."

For a moment she hesitated, her blue eyes dilated, her figure thrilled at the thought of freedom. I feared I had gone too far, feared that my wild bird would choose to take flight back to the wilderness from which she came.

"I should like to go," she said, "so much. And yet——" Her mouth tightened, the smile went from her eyes. "I promised I'd stay with you for a year," she said slowly, "and, if possible, I'll keep my word."

"Very well, Belinda, in that case I'll do my best to help you. You are sure of your decision in regard to the Duke's proposal?"

"I cannot possibly marry him!"

"It's a pity you did not realise that a little sooner," I returned drily. "However, we must deal with the matter as it is. The only thing to do under the circumstances is to persuade the Duke to announce his engagement to you."

"Lady Peggy, I can't, I——"

"Allow me to finish, if you please. The engagement will be one in name, no more. In a month's time when we leave Cairo I will announce that the engagement has been

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broken off. You can then start afresh with the benefit of your experience."

"But it isn't honest or straightforward," she protested. "People will think it's a real engagement, and all the time it's pretence."

"Just as the Duke thought you really cared for him," I remarked. "And——"

"That's not the same," she said, "he mistook friendliness for love. I was not to blame for that, Lady Peggy."

"Blameless or otherwise you must accept the consequences, Belinda. Your engagement to the Duke must be announced to-morrow, or—" I paused significantly—"Come," I added more gently, "it's not so very dreadful. The engagement will be one in name only. At any rate, it is the only way to stop all gossip. You had better consent, Belinda, indeed, if you can't do so, I shall in self-defence be compelled to cable to your father."

"Very well," she said desperately, "it must be as you say."

"I will send for the Duke at once," I answered, "and ask him to consent to the arrangement."

A few minutes later the Duke appeared. I took him aside and explained in a few words what was required of him. He behaved beautifully, and with the greatest tact.

"I am more sorry than I can say that I should have distressed you, Miss North," he said to Belinda. "That my indiscretion should have caused you unpleasantness is a terrible thought. I think, however, Lady Peggy's notion will solve the difficulty. I understand that the world in general, and the Continental in particular, are to believe we are engaged? A formal engagement, meaning just as much or as little as you wish. You leave here, I think, in about a month? For a month then, Miss North, we are engaged. Do you consent?"

I caught my breath and waited in suspense for her reply. It did not come readily.

She was trying to think out the matter steadily and fearlessly.

For a moment things trembled in the balance, but only for a moment. She was so young, so inexperienced, so utterly unable to weigh the pros and cons. She thought, poor child, that she had really committed a grave breach of decorum, and never for a moment suspected I was laughing in my sleeve. She had made a mistake, and—however innocently—according to her simple creed she must suffer for it. She would not appeal to her father. She would find a way out for herself.

With a long-drawn sigh and a little quiver of the mouth, she answered:

"I consent."

The Duke bowed; I smiled upon Belinda and congratulated myself.

I redoubled those congratulations the next minute. Close on Belinda's words, the door opened, a tall, straight figure entered, and walked up to me.

It was David Carr himself, just sixty seconds late!

"I've come to say 'Good-bye,' Lady Carstairs," said the intrepid young man, after he had exchanged greetings. "I am sure you will be glad to hear your influence has obtained me the offer of a lucrative position. Sir Willoughby told me how much you had interested yourself on my behalf. I am going to St. Petersburg to superintend the building of a bridge across the Neva."

"Charming place, St. Petersburg," drawled the Duke. "I congratulate you, er—er—Mr. Carr."

David did not trouble to respond to the congratulation. He turned abruptly to Belinda.

"I may not see you again before the year is up," he said. "The year of waiting that you have imposed on me. You will see me then?"

"Surely," she answered, "I look forward to the end of that year as eagerly as you do. You'll remember that," she glanced at him pathetically, "*whatever* you may hear?" She put out her hand as she spoke and clasped his with a strong and steady pressure.

"I will," he answered gravely, then with a curt nod to the Duke, and a more courteous salutation to myself, he prepared to depart.

"A moment." The Duke's voice stayed him at the door. "You are interested in Miss North, I think?"

The young man frowned. Belinda, with terror-stricken eyes, watched Eastacres' face. Was he going to tell her lover here, before her face, of that ill-considered promise she had just made? It could not be, she thought. It was impossible a man could be so cruel.

With a smile, Eastacres continued to regard his rival.

"If you're not interested, there's nothing more to say," he continued languidly. "I had a piece of information to give you concerning the young lady, that was all."

"Well?" David's tone was not conciliatory.

The Duke paused, and lit a cigarette.

"I don't know that it concerns you really," he said, "still it's as well for you to know." Then with a sudden change of voice he drew himself up, and laid his hand upon Belinda's arm.

"We're just engaged," he said calmly. "Miss North accepted me a minute before you came into the room."

For a moment I thought that David would have struck him. The veins stood out on his forehead like cords, his face worked convulsively. Then from his throat came the words, half-inarticulate with passion:

"A lie, *it is a lie*," and then with a quick uplifting of the voice, a short sharp cry of agonised appeal:

"*Belinda!*"

White as death she came a step or two towards him, but what she was about to say or do I cannot tell. For of a sudden her will gave out, her nerves collapsed. Without a cry or call she fell. For the first and only time while she was with me, Belinda fainted.

David was bending over her in a second, pushing Eastacres aside. Without ceremony or excuse I put them both out of the room, and ministered myself to the fair-haired heap upon the floor.

She came round very quickly, and was horribly ashamed of her weakness.

"Will you do something for me, Lady Peggy?" she said wistfully.

"I suppose you want me to interview this dragoman of yours, is that it, Belinda?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I should not think of such a thing. I want you to persuade the Duchess to let Honoria sit with me for a bit, that's all. Will you send and ask her now?"

The request seemed harmless enough for me to grant it. Honoria, I knew, had not the sense to take a message to David undiscovered—let alone the courage. I saw Belinda to her room, and fetched Honoria to keep her company.

Then with a not unwarranted sense of self-approbation, I descended to the card-room with a view to finding out if anything unpleasant had occurred between Eastacres and the young engineer.

David Carr caught sight of me in the doorway, and, seizing my arm, he drew me back in the passage.

"Is she better?" he cried hoarsely.

"Yes," I said, "it was only a slight attack—the heat, I suppose."

"Is it true"—his fingers tightened on my arm—"true that she's going to marry *that*"—he pointed scornfully to where the Duke stood the centre of a group of men in the card-room.

"She's engaged to the Duke of Eastacres, if that is what you mean," I answered readily.

"You swear it?"

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"Don't be absurd," I said sharply. "You're behaving like a madman. For goodness' sake pull yourself together."

With an impatient gesture I shook off his grasp and walked into the room. He followed me. Apprehensive that he would make a scene I asked Sir Willoughby to reason with him.

The Baronet, who had a real liking and esteem for David, readily agreed. I had the satisfaction of seeing the young man's face gradually settle into acquiescence if not resignation. Another few minutes and he would have left the Continental, convinced that henceforth his life must be apart from Belinda's. He would have made an effective exit and have rendered things considerably easier for me.

That he did not thus depart was entirely owing to Honoria, whose base ingratitude to me I cannot find adequate words to condemn.

She entered the room in her usual helpless fashion, drifting against people and things in a way that made me want to shake her.

At last she landed on the hearthrug, immediately in front of David Carr. Before I had time to realise what she was about to do, the wretched and ungrateful girl, with an unpardonable breach of faith, commenced as follows:

"I've brought you a message from Belinda, Mr. Carr. She says she won't be married for a year at least, and will you please come to the wedding."

With a flash of his dark eyes David took Honoria's hand in his.

"I will," he said. "And thank you very much." And with Belinda's last words ringing in his ears, a strange new hope in his heart, he left.

Honoria did not escape so easily however. Her punishment followed close upon her crime. With quiet deliberation the Duke beckoned a tall, bearded individual lounging by the window.

He rose at the Duke's invitation and came towards them.

"Honoria," said Eastacres calmly, "here is Mark Striven," and his look said all the rest.

Mark's appearance was not unprepossessing. Broad shouldered, loosely built, he had the easy carriage and affected the easy manners of the "big" man. Not till you came to know and study him did you realise that as his trim, torpedo beard hid a cruel and sensual mouth, so the apparent heartiness of his bearing veiled a crafty and treacherous disposition that only recognised the claims of "self."

What chance would the weak and wavering Honoria have against him?

Mark's poverty and not his will consented to the match. I gathered that £1,000 was the price of his liberty. For that sum he was prepared to love and cherish dear Honoria to the best of his limited capacity in that direction.

It was no business of mine, and yet, knowing all I did, I could not restrain a shudder of pity as I met the agonised appeal in her eyes. She was a poor specimen of a woman now, and what would she be a year after her marriage with him? I got up and left the room. I felt the necessity of a change of thought.

For the next week or two things went on fairly well. Belinda accepted the inevitable, if not with a good grace, with rare courage. She received calmly all congratulations, and smiled sweetly, if vaguely, in reply. I had of course informed Hardy North of the engagement, and had received a joyful, not to say triumphant, epistle in reply. Belinda read it with stoicism.

"I shall explain everything to dad when we leave here," she said. "It's not worth while to trouble *now*."

I commended her decision and pronounced the fact of her engagement far and wide. I was determined public opinion should force her into marriage. In the face of an outraged Society she dared not draw back.

Belinda and the Duke were together only in public. She declined to be alone with him for five minutes, and I thought it better on that point to give way. For the most part she went about with Midge, Honoria being in attendance on Mark.

The little Yankee had forgotten her grief at Reggie's defection, and was flirting desperately with an artist, a new arrival at the Continental. Reg still worshipped Belinda, but at safe distance. She had begun to learn the lesson of discretion.

Our stay in Cairo was drawing to a close, the Khedive's ball would end the season. It would also, unless I were careful, end the Duke's engagement to Belinda.

My plans, however, were well laid. On the occasion of the ball, the most important function of the season, I determined to make Belinda's marriage with the Duke inevitable. I had arranged for her special presentation to the Khedive, and that personage, prompted from the right quarter, would doubtless refer to her approaching wedding.

It would, I thought, need a stronger will even than Belinda's to disavow her undertaking in the face of Royal congratulations.

I had sent to Paris for her ball gown, and I was genuinely delighted with her appearance when she tried it on.

"You must wear your pearls, Belinda," I said, pondering, "and some jasmine in your hair. Get your necklace, dear, and let me see the effect. Come, don't be lazy, child, it is not very late."

Belinda, however, made no attempt to move, but stared straight before her into space.

"What's the matter?" I cried. "You don't mean to say you've lost the pearls? Why don't you speak?"

"I've not lost them, Lady Peggy," she said, flushing, "but they are gone all the same. Somebody has stolen them."

"When did you miss them?" I said sharply.

"A few days ago," she replied.

"Why on earth didn't you tell me, Belinda. One would think you knew the thief and were trying to screen him. Why don't you say right out what you know."

"I know nothing for certain," she replied, "and I mean to keep my suspicions to myself. You'd much better let the matter drop, Lady Peggy," she went on earnestly, "I don't mind much about the pearls."

"But I mind a great deal. In fact I shan't know peace until they are recovered."

"Please, Lady Peggy, don't say anything more about it, to-night, at all events."

She looked so pathetic that I was obliged to yield. Considerably mystified and more than a little troubled, I withdrew.

Who was the thief, and why should Belinda try to shield him? Even stranger than her reticence was her resignation at the loss of the necklace. One could more easily understand her foregoing vengeance than giving up the jewels.

It was a difficult situation, I felt my inability to cope with it unaided. In this dilemma I decided to seek the assistance of the Duchess. She would, I felt sure, give me valuable advice. I decided to see her that night; it was barely twelve o'clock, and we never stood on ceremony with one another. Relieved at this decision I took my way towards the Duchess' apartments. They were three in number, bath-room and bedroom, with a smaller room opening out of the latter, the resting place of the unfortunate Honoria.

I heard voices in her Grace's domain, and wishing for a private interview, I decided to reconnoitre before making my presence known. Her room had two entrances, one from the passage, one through the bath-room. I entered the last-named, and peered through the door of communication. It was not tightly shut, the interior of the apartment was visible through the opening.

At the far end of the room, on the threshold of her own chamber, stood Honoria, lean and lank in her long white nightdress. A brush was in her hand, and an expression of fear on her countenance.

I leant forward to ascertain the cause of her alarm. I followed the direction of her eyes, to where they rested on her mother. And as I gazed, a cry of horror rose to my lips.

The Duchess of Eastacres stood in the middle of the room, immediately beneath the electric light. One hand was raised in a threatening attitude towards her daughter.

And in the other lay—Belinda's pearls!

(The explanation of this scene will be given next Tuesday.)

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Clouds in a Summer Sky.

Telling of a Quarrel, a Horsewhip, and a Reconciliation.

Harry Neville and his wife had lived one happy year of married life. They had their little differences, of course, odd little corners had to be smoothed off. Both were somewhat impulsive, sensitive and quick-tempered, but the magic of love, combined with common sense, had helped him, and he was increasingly thankful that he had met, and wooed and won her; while she was proud of her strong, manly husband who, for her sake, had altered so much of life, and, except for a rare visit to his old club, or once or twice playing in his old football team, had settled down to home, to find all his happiness in it, and the society of his bright young wife.

They had known little of each other before marriage. He had met her at some friends with whom she was staying in London. He had heard how she, after enjoying the comforts of easy circumstances, and after she had just finished her college course, had been thrown on the world to seek a livelihood on the sudden death of her father, when it was found that he was so deeply involved that there was nothing left for his only child but a good education, strong will, and health.

Harry, from their first meeting, had fallen desperately in love, and holding a fair position in a city firm, had soon persuaded her to share with him the comfortable suburban home, where they had so happily passed the first year of their married life.

And then suddenly, without warning, came the rude shock, and the dark cloud and storm.

On Thursday morning, while breakfasting somewhat hurriedly, for he had been spending the previous evening with some old club friends, and had risen late, Harry said:

"I am sorry to play truant so much, darling, not seeing you all day yesterday, and now I want you to spare me again this evening, and after that I will be a good boy and stay at home."

"Why, you gadabout!" she answered. "Where are you going to-night?"

"Well," he replied, "Jim Thornton, an old chum of mine, is going abroad to a good appointment he has secured, and came round to the office yesterday to ask me to dine with him and some other fellows at 'The Holborn' to-night. I do not think I shall be very late; but as I am rather busy, and do not wish to leave the office early, I think I will take with me what I want and change there. Put up my things, dear, and I will make up for leaving you so much by being extra good. You know where I am most happy, but I cannot break off all old friendships at once!"

"And I do not want you to," she answered. "You devote too much time to me now, and I sometimes fear lest you should tire of so much woman's society—I love to have you with me, but I want you still to mix with men. It must be better for you sometimes."

She ran off, and soon came back with a small bag containing what he required, bade him a warm good-bye, and he went off, as happy a man as entered the city that day.

By one of those strange chances which, unimportant as they may seem at first, are pregnant with vast issues, he found it necessary during the day to make an appointment for late in the afternoon, which brought him very near home, and so he altered his plan of dressing at the office, and resolved to give his wife a pleasant surprise; spending an hour at home, and going thence to keep his evening engagement.

He let himself in with a smile, as he pictured her surprise, and going through the hall found her in the little room opposite the dining-room, which they used as library, smoking, writing and reading-room, in fact a snug little place where rigid order was not enforced, and where either together or separately they have passed many contented hours.

Coming in suddenly upon her, she started and, as he thought, with a look of some disappointment, said:

"You told me you were not coming home till late!"

He went over to her and kissed her, when he noticed a letter which, after writing, she had apparently let fall on to the floor by the writing-table.

Stooping to pick it up he said, laughing.

"Going to resign, and writing for another place?"

She coloured, and hastily made for the letter, saying:

"Oh, it is only a spoilt letter which I re-wrote this morning, I meant to have torn it up!" But he had already picked it up, and without any intention of reading it had caught sight of its first words and suddenly grew stern.

"Give it to me!" she cried, as he held it from her with one hand, while with the other he pushed her almost rudely away. Then, glancing again at the letter, he uttered an oath, thrust her down upon a chair, and exclaimed—

"You false-hearted Jezebel!"

"Harry, how dare you? What do you mean?"

"Silence," he said, pressing his hand heavily on her, and holding her fixed, and she, for the moment terrified, remained quiet, while he read the letter, which ran—

> "My Dearest George,—I cannot tell you how I have felt since, after three years, we so unexpectedly met yesterday, and I feel how great a wrong I did you in leaving you without knowledge of my movements, and to suppose I was indifferent. But after yesterday's meeting, when you put your arm round me with the old tenderness and forgave my folly, all the old feeling has come back, or rather revived, for really it never left my heart, which poured itself out to you so freely in the dear old days, and I love you still more since you tell me you have never loved me less than then.
>
> "But I cannot write all I want to say, and am sending this rather that we may take advantage of a grand opportunity which has unexpectedly presented itself for us to have an hour or two *quite alone*.
>
> "My husband this morning told me of an engagement which keeps him in town till late (probably eleven o'clock) to-night, so you must contrive to come to me about seven o'clock (what a pity you are engaged all day!)
>
> "Our interview yesterday was all too short. I am longing to have you with me, to lay my head on you in the old way, and tell you all my thoughts, and show you that you hold the same place ever in the heart of your loving Kitty."

For a moment after reading this he remained silent, then, turning with an expression of terrible sternness to his wife, he said:

"Do you say that this was re-written and posted?"

She had recovered herself partially now, and was angry too.

"Yes, I do," she answered, "and how dare you speak to me like this? I can do as I like, I suppose? I am not your slave, to answer for every act to *you!*"

Not noticing her last words he demanded:

"Will this appointment be kept?"

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"Yes, it will, and I shall do just as I please in the matter," was her angry reply.

"You brazen-face! Tell me at once the fellow's surname and address," said he.

"Fellow! Fellow!" she exclaimed scornfully—then suddenly stopping, she looked fixedly at him for a moment as though deciding what course to take. A resolute expression came to her eyes, and angrily stamping her foot, she said: "Find out all you want to know for yourself. Take your hand away, unless you are coward enough to strike me. I might, had you spoken differently, have spared you a part of the pain you shall feel now. But you can do your worst, and I will see that *you* and *you* only shall suffer." He released her, and she rose, and was about to leave the room, when he interposed, and controlling himself by a great effort, spoke again:

"You are utterly shameless; fool that I have been. If I am not coward enough, as you call it, to strike you, be sure of this—the cad to whom your letter is addressed, shall take the punishment for both, and will be in no condition to receive or respond to your brazen confessions."

To this she responded with a curl of the lip, and a scornful laugh which only maddened him. But he said nothing further—only took her firmly by the arm and led her into the dining-room, placed her at the end farthest from the door, pushed the table to the same end of the room in front of her. She made no resistance, and did not speak—contenting herself with looking angrily at him as he sat her down, and putting on a look of sneering defiance.

He rang the bell, and as the maid responded, went to the room door to screen the view of her mistress, and said:

"A visitor will call shortly, about 7 o'clock, whom you are to show straight into *this* room, and to whom on no account you are to say I am at home. Mind you do exactly as I have told you." The girl, half-frightened at the stern mood of her usually good-tempered master, withdrew. He then stepped into the hall, and returned with a heavy riding-whip (an old treasure of his boyhood, which had been given him by a farmer uncle when staying in the country). Throwing this on a chair he looked at his watch and sat down.

Then she spoke, passionately, disdainfully, as though determined to goad him to the very utmost.

"You brave man, armed. Let me give you warning. You think to make me suffer in seeing, and another suffer in bearing your vengeance. Do not be too sure. Strong men have met defeat, and" (raising her voice) "so will you. In less than half-an-hour you will be cowed, humbled, and, as sure as I am here, you shall be thoroughly punished."

Such unabashed defiance, such absence of all compunction, and evident desire, that not content with the wrong he suffered, she should have him still further outraged—this was unbearable. He started forward, and for a moment it seemed he would strike her. Then her face changed, and she looked him straight in the eyes, with a glance which while he looked, seemed to disarm him, and she said as her voice seemed for the first time to betray something of fear:

"Harry, would you strike me?"

His hand dropped down again, and for ten minutes he sat buried in deep thought. It is wonderful how in the great crises of life, thoughts shape themselves so rapidly, and present so vividly, in so brief a space of time, the events of the past and the possibilities of the future. As the past months were lived again in those brief moments, even he himself was surprised to realise how his first anger turned to yearning love. As the memories came back of the tender glances of those beautiful eyes, which had just looked into his, of sweet endearing words, and tender caresses; of the devoted kindred soul (as he had thought) which looked through those soft eyes, to meet and mingle with his own. Then notwithstanding her unabashed and defiant attitude, and the terrible disillusionment which had come—so far as *she* was concerned, his anger was lost in grief, and thoughts of vengeance lost in care for her.

At last he rose, and seeing that he had but a few minutes probably at his disposal, said:

"Kate, after you leave this room to-night, we meet no more. There are two courses open to you. Go to your aunt, if it can be arranged; or if you prefer it, take this house and its contents and have with you some middle-aged lady companion. My salary shall be equally divided between us so long as you give me no further reason to alter the arrangement, and on the express condition that you never willingly see again the—the—person you will see here shortly. Let me have your decision by letter in the morning, and if you decide to remain here, I shall leave for good.

"If, at any time you need protection or any help, write to me at the office, and so far as I can render it you shall have it. Although it has all proved a delusion, and my earthly heaven a fool's paradise, I cannot forget it, and for the sake of the fair dream, although it turns out but a dream, you shall not want a friend."

"You are exceedingly kind," she said. "But these are matters we can discuss later on when you are less lordly, and in a far humbler state of mind, as most certainly you will be before this is finished."

Her sneering tone again aroused his fury. To feel that she had not only so deeply injured him, but gloried in the hope that he would be cowed, perhaps beaten by her unknown lover—made him conscious of a burning desire to strangle the very life out of the man he hoped soon to have in his grip.

At that moment the visitor's bell rang, and they heard the maid answer it. Starting up, he grasped the riding-whip, and threw himself behind the door, just as it swung open, and the maid announced:

"Miss Georgina Foster."

And there came into the room a tall, lovely woman, evidently some two or three years his wife's senior—to whom his wife, pushing back the table from her, flew with outstretched arms crying:

"George, darling, I am so glad you have come. Finding you were coming, my husband here insisted on running home just to wait for an introduction to my dearest friend, and helpful confidante of the old time, of whom through my folly I had so long lost sight.

"Harry, this is my dear friend Georgina Foster, or George, as I always call her, who used to be sister and mother all in one to me, and whom I met yesterday. She has come to live very near us and, as you know, is going to spend the evening with me, so hurry up, and leave us quickly. For I have so much to tell her."

He came forward dropping the whip behind him, whispering to himself "idiot," "fool" and, with the best grace he could, stammered some common-places. Then, as a great wave of gladness came into his heart, he turned to his wife and began:

"Kitty."

But she turned on him sharply, and bade him make haste, or he would be late for his engagement—adding, I have so much to say to George, whom I only saw for a little while yesterday, and to whom I want to tell all our doings *right up-to-date.*

"But, Kitty"—and his eyes pleaded for compassion——

"Come! Hurry up," she said lightly, and with a smile—but when as she pushed him out of the room her back was to her friend—she answered the appealing glance he gave her with a look of stern anger, and waving him off, closed the door upon him.

After dressing, during which operation he communed with himself, using expressions which it would have been anything but safe for others to use *to* him, he went out. But pausing for a moment at the door of the drawing-room, he heard the merry laughter of two women, who seemed to be enjoying it with infinite relish.

It took him some time, and much persuasion next day, to obtain forgiveness, which, however, was really waiting behind the little storm he had to bear, in a heart which beat with truest love for him, and which had, on reviewing the circumstances, found excuse for his mistake, and was not ill-pleased with him.

G. A. Morrant.

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THE SEABOROUGH MYSTERY.

A Tale of an Artist's Love.

"You will always love me, Dick?"

"Till my death, Flossie!"

The unpleasant memory of those words came to Richard Filby, as he sat on the cliffs a mile away from the little village of Seaborough painting, or rather attempting to paint. What a fool he had been! He had flirted disgracefully with the inn-keeper's daughter Flossie, who had seemingly taken all his attentions in earnest, perfectly unaware that there was another young woman up in London to whom he was engaged. Last evening they had walked out together as usual, wending their way along the shore, and there the declaration of love recorded above had been made. How on earth was he to get out of this imbroglio?

After a few minutes Filby dropped palette and brushes. Ambitious as he was to be famous, he really could not paint this morning. He slipped off his camp-stool and throwing himself full length on the grass, gazed up reflectively into the sky. What a nuisance this artistic temperament was! He was formally betrothed to Freda Withers at Forest Hill, and had no desire to end the betrothal, and yet down here in this romantic little spot the temptation to enjoy himself with Flossie Barnett, who had attracted him the very first moment that he arrived at the inn, had proved too strong to be resisted. It was an innocent entanglement, but how great the cost! He had come down to work and he had been philandering instead. And now the last day but one of his stay had come. What follies were committed in the name of so-called love!

"Nice day sir!"

Filby looked up. It was the coastguard on his round.

"Yes! Rather warm for working though and for walking too I should imagine."

"Oh, I don't mind that. sir! Used to it you see. That's a grand bit of cliff you're painting, sir."

"If I could only get it right it would be."

The coastguard mused, his hand stroking his chin, his eyes taking in the points of the picture.

"Ah, I mind that spot well. There was a suicide from there about a year back. A chap (he was the son of a farmer round here) as was gone on a girl that he couldn't get jumped right off there into the sea. His coat was found on the cliff—he'd taken it off before he jumped—but his body must have been washed away by the sea, for though we searched high and low we never found it. It was a sad case."

"Very! I didn't know events like that occurred in this part."

"Sometimes, sir! Folks do silly things for love all the world over. Well, I must be moving on!"

"Have a bit of tobacco?"

"Thank ye, sir! That's real stuff. Good morning!"

Directly the man had passed on, Filby began pacing up and down on the cliff. An idea had come, the execution of which might solve the difficulty he was in, and with free movement of his limbs Filby always thought better. The notion presented difficulties at first, but one by one he saw his way out of them. What a lucky thing to have had that conversation with the coastguard! The means of relief from all his troubles was at hand.

That night an unusual thing occurred at the Seaborough Inn. Unseen by anyone, a man stole out at midnight, holding some dark objects under his arm, and made straight for the edge of the cliffs. Not a soul was about; only the distant sighing of the waves broke the stillness. Hour after hour passed by, yet the man did not return. But the wind rose, the sighing of the sea became a tumultuous roar, and by the time the light broke a regular tempest was in progress.

* * * * *

Two hours prior to that mysterious midnight flight Flossie Barnett sat in her bedroom, her usually smiling face most seriously set. A letter on foreign note-paper and bearing the Cape Town postmark was in her hands and she had committed the contents to memory for about the tenth time. It was from her soldier-lover, Jack Preston, written a couple of days before he was to embark on the transport for England. In a very short while the writer would be here in person, with the plainly stated object of claiming her as his bride.

Now Flossie was in a quandary. Her little flirtation with their visitor, Mr. Filby, had taken a far more serious turn than she had anticipated. She had merely intended to amuse herself with him during the absence of her real lover, and surely a girl left by herself for two whole years had liberty to seek some mild amusement. On a higher social level than herself he had treated her as an equal, and that had rather turned her head. Besides, a halo of romance encircled his ample locks—he was an artist; in a few short years he would write R.A. after his name and have the free right of hanging mediocre pictures on the Academy walls. In a confidential moment Filby had drawn for her this vision of the future, of course omitting any allusion to mediocrity.

Yes, the affair had gone much farther than Flossie intended. As a matter of fact, she was enjoying herself so hugely that she had not the strength of will to draw back before the mischief was done. Last night she had been drawn into a horrible lie. She had told him that she loved him, whilst all the time her heart was with her old lover abroad. And this morning had brought a letter from him, a letter whose every line sat in judgment upon her and rebuked her for her folly.

She recalled Mr. Filby's manner and looks of the previous evening. How dreadfully solemn he had looked—and yet how finely picturesque! She had certainly made a splendid conquest, and if his heart was won but to be broken afterwards, still her achievement would provide food for her vanity for years.

Leaving that side of the question, however, Flossie turned to the consideration of the more practical matter—what was to be done now? Mr. Filby must be informed, and that speedily, of Jack Preston's existence, but how could the information be most delicately conveyed. A personal interview would be most satisfactory, but Flossie shrank from cutting a poor figure at that. What would be the gent'est way of letting this artist lover down?

Ah, she had it! Mr. Filby was returning to town on the morrow. She had his London address, and would write there a letter, which should reach him soon after his arrival home, explaining as best she might her previous commitment to another. It was an easy and capital solution of the difficulty.

The plan was no sooner settled than put into effect. Flossie took from a drawer paper and pen, and after a little cogitation fashioned the epistle. She read it through, approved, sealed and stamped the envelope. She would run out and post it herself the first thing in the morning.

Her mind at ease Flossie got into bed and was soon asleep. Had she only remained awake a little longer, she would have

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heard the stairs creak under passing footsteps and the old inn door squeak as it was being stealthily closed.

* * * * *

Directly she was up next morning Flossie went out and posted her letter. A blustering gale was raging and the wind lashed fiercely in her face, but her mission was far too important to admit of delay. On returning to the inn she ran in the passage into the arms of Bell the barman.

"Oh, miss, I was looking for you everywhere! There's someone in the parlour as wants to see you most particular."

"Who, Bell?"

"A sailor man I should reckon by his rig-out. He seems most excited."

Wondering who her visitor could be at this early hour Flossie turned the handle of the parlour door. A man whom she recognised as one of the local coastguards rose and touched his forehead.

"Beg pardon for disturbing you so early miss, but I've some very bad news. There's been, I'm afraid, another case of suicide from the Seaborough cliff."

"Who?" queried Flossie, turning pale.

"A gent as I've had one or two chats with of late. I don't know his name, but he was stopping here he told me. One of those painter chaps."

"Mr. Filby? You can't mean it. You must be mistaken." A wild look came into the girl's eyes.

"Don't think I am. Perhaps you recognise these articles?"

Going to the back of the chair upon which he had been sitting, the man picked up some objects from the ground. They were a man's coat and waistcoat of a rather pronounced check. Startled recognition stood in Flossie's face.

"Ah, I see you know them, miss. They're the very clothes—a little stained with paint, you see—that that artist fellow was wearing yesterday. But that's not all. When I found those on the cliff, I turned them over, and there, pinned to the inside pocket, was this envelope. I'm not much of a scholar, but I think it's addressed to you, miss."

Flossie took the note with trembling fingers, and, finding herself unable to stand any longer, subsided into a chair. She guessed the contents. Mad with love for her, Dick Filby must have committed suicide. At last she got the envelope open, and the few brief lines within confirmed her worst fears.

"Dearest Flossie," *it ran.* "*Forgive me the step I have taken—believe me, it was the only one. We loved one another too passionately to be happy apart for a single moment and there was a life between that would always have divided us. I cannot explain but, dearest, I could never have lived without you, so I have chosen what they say is the pleasantest method of departing from existence. Treasure the lovely time we had together. Your broken-hearted,*

Dick."

"*I should like you to keep the one painting I did at Seaborough as a souvenir.*"

Flossie read it through twice and at last the sense began to beat in upon her brain. She had driven the man who loved her into a watery grave.

The coastguard stood quietly by, waiting for her to speak. Finally with an apologetic little cough he broke the silence.

"So he has drowned hisself, miss?"

Flossie nodded.

"He seemed a morbid kind of chap—I thought that when I spoke to him yesterday. So dissatisfied-like about his painting. I suppose it isn't a love affair like that young Perkins'?"

Flossie had recovered sufficiently to be on the defence.

"Oh, no, you mustn't think that! Mr. Filby wasn't very successful as an artist."

"Says so in that note, perhaps?"

She must baffle the coastguard's curiosity.

"No! This—er—simply leaves a little picture of his as a gift for me. Have you been to the police-station yet?"

"I came here first but I must go there straight now."

"Do me a favour! You must speak about the clothes, of course, but don't mention this note! It's quite unimportant!"

The coastguard scratched his head.

"I know I'm silly but I'm engaged, and all that will get about the village, and I don't want my young man to know that I've had a present from this Mr. Filby."

The coastguard, won by her pretty looks, promised, and Flossie breathed afresh.

"You haven't found the body?" she asked.

"Not yet, miss! Perhaps this storm will have swept it miles down the coast. Well, I must go and tell the police."

He was no sooner gone than Flossie burst into tears. The affair was terrible. Even if her part in the matter did not transpire, she would suffer compunctions of conscience for weeks for letting him proceed so far.

She went upstairs to the room which their visitor had occupied. The bed had not been slept in. Most of his belongings had been dispatched to London by train the previous day. Flossie once more broke down. She would never, never flirt again as long as she lived.

* * * * *

That same afternoon Richard Filby in the flesh arrived at his lodgings in West Kensington. He did not look like a man who had lately undergone a fatal experience. His cheeks were bronzed and his step was brisk—indeed the first remark which his landlady made was to compliment him on his improved appearance.

"Thank you, Mrs. Seymour, I've had a very good time. By the way, has my luggage come?"

"Early this morning, sir, by railway van."

"That's all right. I'll dine at seven as usual, Mrs. Seymour."

Filby went upstairs and proceeded to unpack. The few articles left at the inn to allay suspicion, could be replaced at a very small cost, whilst a breach of promise case might have landed him in hundreds.

He smiled as he thought of his clever and successful ruse.

He pictured the local constable assuming terrific importance, declining to give any information whatever, and all the inhabitants clustering in knots and discussing the news.

Now Filby was not a hard-hearted man, and he felt just the least bit sorry as he thought of Flossie Barnett. She would naturally be much cut up, for she loved him tremendously—but there, she was a high-spirited girl and took life pretty easily. And then, of course, marriage between them had always been quite impossible.

Dinner was duly served, and Filby did the meal ample justice. Over his cigar he commenced to nod, and remembered that he had lost a night's rest. He would go to bed very early to-night.

A knock at the door. The maid entered with a letter. He looked at the envelope and started. It bore the Seaborough postmark; it was from Flossie Barnett. He was thoroughly roused now. Had his trick been discovered?

He tore the letter open feverishly. The date reassured him; it was written last night. What on earth had Flossie to say?

Three minutes later Filby was pacing the room, waving the letter irritably in the air. His scheme had gone for nothing; all his trouble had been wasted. This chit of a girl had been simply playing with his affections all the time, and here was her confession.

He seized pen and paper. That night the following communication was dropped into the post.

Mr. Richard Filby begs to inform Miss Flossie Barnett that he is still alive and well, and has returned to town. On second consideration, he did not think Miss Barnett worth drowning for, and her letter to hand this evening confirms him in this opinion. Mr. Filby hopes that Miss Barnett will attain happiness in her projected union and that his little picture may find a niche on her walls.

But by return of post without line or comment, Filby to his great indignation, got his picture back disfigured almost beyond recognition.

Herbert Jamieson.

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THE STORY OF THE WEEK.

SEE OUR COLOURED COVER.

Her Own Enemy.

The Strange Story of a Blow that Missed its Mark.

CHAPTER I.
The Key and the Letter.

"I CAN say no more, Mrs. Brereton, than that we are very well satisfied with the immediate results of the operation. The next few hours will, of necessity, be somewhat critical, and as the most absolute quiet is of vital importance to your husband's chances of recovery, I would beg of you to leave him entirely in his nurses' hands."

"But surely, Sir James, they will allow me to—to assist. A wife's place, at such moments as these, is by her husband's bedside."

The words were uttered naturally enough, a half-suppressed sob lending them a note of feminine pathos. The speaker raised a small, white hand—rendered still smaller and whiter by the drooping lace ruffle at its wrists—as though to brush away a tear.

The great West-end physician frowned and shook his head. "Your husband needs at his bedside," he said, "those who have been specially trained for emergencies like the present, and who have no relationship with the patient to unsteady their nerves. When Mr. Brereton has definitely rallied, your co-operation will be most valuable; your presence now could only agitate him. I repeat, the slightest excitement will be disastrous, to put it plainly, fatal."

The black-robed, still youthful figure sank into a couch and the delicate brunette features were hidden on the cushioned arm of the lounge. The other shrugged his shoulders and took up his hat.

"After all, Mrs. Brereton," he observed, "I have every confidence in your good sense and your wifely affection. Edward Brereton is an old friend of mine, as well as a distinguished patient; you will forgive me easily enough when, in a month or two, you take Ned to Brighton to brace him up after his little experience of modern surgery, before giving back to the Law Courts their most brilliant ornament."

With a curt, yet polished farewell, he stepped noiselessly from the room. As he did so, Hester Brereton abandoned her crouching posture and sat back among the cushions of the lounge. Her cheeks were dry, her eyes cold and hard.

"You do not like me, Sir James Jardine," she said aloud; "what trick are you trying to play me? You banish me from my husband's room, perhaps from his death-bed, very politely, no doubt, but you do it—you!—you who tried to reinstate Douglas Brereton in his father's good graces when luck enabled me to oust him from them, you who refused to become a trustee of the will by which he was disinherited! 'Charming young step-mothers, my dear madam,' you told me, 'do not see these things as men of the world do.' Oh, no, Sir James, you are no friend of mine! And shall I leave you at a moment like this, to whisper who knows what counsels of reconciliation into my husband's ears?"

She put up her slippered feet indolently on the couch and fell into a reverie—a reverie that lasted for some time. The gloom of the Autumn afternoon deepened insensibly, the glow of the smouldering fire in the grate beside her began to illuminate luridly her handsome, selfish countenance.

Outside an occasional cab rolled, with a muffled rumble, through the stately square, its wheels subdued by the straw that covered the road before the residence of Edward Brereton, the most brilliant of many brilliant King's Counsel, a rising member of Parliament, and one of the wealthiest practising barristers in England. Upstairs the keen brain and marvellous memory that had built up an almost international reputation were still vaguely clouded by the sickening fumes of the chloroform that had rendered him mercifully oblivious to the surgeon's knife.

The stealthy entrance of a servant disturbed Mrs. Brereton's reflections, and she rose to her feet. The man brought her a card on a salver, and she took it abstractedly, then started. It read, "Mr. Douglas Brereton."

"Mr. Brereton asked to see you most particularly, ma'am," she was told, "he asked me to mention, ma'am, begging your pardon, that he would not quit the house till he had done so."

Hester Brereton bit her lip thoughtfully. "I will see him," she answered slowly; "here."

The footman bowed, switched on the light to the electric pendants above and about her, and departed. When the door opened again it was to admit a young fellow, fair-haired and stalwart. He was well-dressed, and his shrewd yet pleasant face wore an expression of mingled sternness and melancholy. Hester looked at him, playing with the lace at her wrists.

"Well," she remarked, "and what do you hope to gain by this extorted interview?"

Douglas Brereton moved across the thickly-carpeted floor, and paused, studying her.

"You have done your work thoroughly," he said, "when my father can come to the very verge of the grave and I not hear of it. A paragraph in this morning's *Times* was my first intimation of his sudden illness—I only noticed it at my club a quarter of an hour ago."

His step-mother sneered. "And you have hastened hither to try and make your peace with him and his hard-won fortune before it is too late?" she said. "You are unlucky, Douglas Brereton, your father has just undergone a serious, almost desperate operation, and even his wife is not allowed to see him. You are already disinherited, as you know, and under the circumstances you can scarcely count upon the chances of a death-bed reconciliation."

Douglas Brereton shuddered. "My poor, poor father," he exclaimed, "and this is the woman who came between us!"

Hester smiled. "You mistake," she objected, "it was not I who came between you, but another woman. You cannot wonder that your father, brilliant, successful, ambitious refused his assent to his son's engagement with a low-born hospital nurse."

Her step-son folded his arms disdainfully. "Ambitious my father may be," he retorted, "but my mother was only a curate's daughter, and they were as poor as church-mice when they married. Better to be poor and happy than be

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TURN TO PAGE 719 AND WIN A HANDSOME GRAMOPHONE.

rich and marry a woman capable of parting son and father, that she may inherit undivided the fortune for whose sake she can count upon her husband's death."

A spasm of ferocity wrung Hester's face. "You came to insult me then," she said, "though you know your father would have you put out by his servants if he could hear the cowardly accusation you have made against his wife. Go, if your father dies, you are a beggar; if he lives so long as there is a spark of love in his heart for me, he is dead to you. Go!"

Douglas Brereton hesitated, but his step-mother extended a hand towards an ivory button in the wall at the fireside. Yielding to the inevitable, he crossed without a word the threshold of the room.

In the corridor beyond he lingered, the old house was familiar to him. Mrs. Brereton's drawing-room was on the first floor, a passage on the right went to his father's chamber. He stepped a pace or two along it thrilling with emotion, but halted abruptly. No, no, he must think of the sick man, rallying slowly from his dangerous operation—he could do nothing, nothing!"

Someone brushed by him—a woman in nurse's uniform—and an exclamation broke from Douglas Brereton.

"Winnie," he whispered, "great Heavens—you here!"

The nurse turned, a gentle, irrepressibly girlish face showing itself under the stiff cap. She had a letter in her fingers—an envelope addressed but unstamped.

"Douglas!" she murmured. "How strange that we should meet like this! Yes! I was sent in a hurry as a night-nurse to take the place of another one who could not be spared. I did not know the patient was your father. But I had to go through with it for a while, and, of course, they had never seen me. Even your friend, Sir James, doesn't know me by sight. I am so glad they have allowed you to come, though I was afraid when I didn't see you about the house that—that the quarrel was irreparable. I do wish I had never said 'Yes' to you, dear. But there, I mustn't stay, I go on duty in a moment, I was looking for Mrs. Brereton with a letter. Perhaps we shall see one another again soon."

She glanced at him—a shy, tender, hasty glance, that lent a sudden beauty to her grave features—and, giving him no time to answer her rapid sentences, slipped past him down the corridor.

Revolving bewilderedly the coincidence that had brought Winifred Carr, his betrothed wife, to wait upon the father who, on her account, had disinherited his son, Douglas Brereton went down the wide staircase and let himself out at the heavy hall-doors. He had scarcely rounded the head of the flight before Hester Brereton, emerging from her drawing-room, encountered the nurse with the letter.

"Anything wanted, nurse?" she asked coldly. "one of the servants would have answered the bedroom-bell; you need not leave your patient."

Winifred drew herself up. "I am not yet on duty, madam," she said, "and we are anxious to keep everything as quiet as possible in this part of the house. Before Mr. Brereton took the chloroform he insisted on writing this note, which he wished to have posted. It has been overlooked for half an hour, so I just brought it down. No doubt you will take charge of it."

Hester assented haughtily, and with pulses beating unaccountably, carried the envelope back into the drawing-room, as Winifred Carr, having administered her snub, retraced her steps to the sick room. Alone in her apartment, Mrs. Brereton was scrutinising the envelope in her hand. The name on it was "Robert Osler," and the address was one in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The name and address were those of Edward Brereton's own solicitor, and there was something in the envelope, something that felt like a key.

Moved by an impulse, Hector pulled at the flap. It was imperfectly attached and came open. She plucked out the inclosed missive—in which was folded a small steel key of intricate design—and read it. It began with a brief reference to Edward Brereton's approaching operation, and went on:

"Herewith is the key of the little strong-box in my bedroom. It contains the will you last made for me. I am glad it is in existence, in case of accidents. Had the previous one stood, I could not have been content to jeopardise my life. It was a cruel, unnatural document; you had better destroy it at once, that there may be no record of it."

Hester knitted her brows. So she was cheated, after all, and her husband had relented towards his only child. If he died she would lose a great part of his wealth; if he lived, he would be reconciled to his son. What should she—what could she do?

Her fingers closed upon the key, which was that of the strong-box where the new will lay. Destroy that document, and the old one—the one the solicitor had in his possession—held good.

But what was the use if her husband recovered? He would make a new will reinstating his son. Some words came into her head—startlingly. "The slightest excitement now would be disastrous—to put it plainly, fatal." That was what Sir James Jardine had said to her twenty minutes before. A shiver passed over her, and she sat down suddenly, the letter shaking violently in her hand. All at once it ceased to flutter; Hester Brereton had regained her self-control.

Putting the letter in her pocket, she stole out of her apartment and went down the passage leading to her husband's room. There was a room on either side of it—the three doors confronted her, closed and silent. One room was an empty guest-chamber, one her husband's own dressing-room, leading to his sleeping chamber.

Hester slipped into the first of the three, she knew that it also communicated, by a locked and disused door, with Edward Brereton's apartment. She had a master-key in her pocket—sure sign of a jealous and suspicious nature!—and opened the communicating door, aware that it was covered on the other side by a tall wardrobe.

Drawing it cautiously ajar, she found that she could just see between the door-frame and the piece of furniture. On the bed, motionless, and extended in an almost death-like position, lay the sick man, a vague and occasional sigh his only token of life. The chamber was dimly illuminated and empty. In the lighted dressing-room beyond, the nurse she had met in the passage was leaning over a tiny spirit-lamp, apparently preparing some food.

Noiselessly Hester pushed the wardrobe on its castors until she could get through. A stride, and she had reached the polished wooden cabinet that concealed her husband's strong-box. She stooped down, slid a walnut panel, and put the key into the inner lock. It turned easily, she whipped open the iron door, and ran through a medley of documents.

A long envelope caught her eye—it was indorsed, "My Will, Edward Brereton," and bore a date. Hester broke the seal and withdrew the inclosure—it was the usual legal-looking document; a glance showed her her step-son's name and the words, "One half of the residue, being approximately, as I believe, about one hundred and twenty thousand pounds." She had been right—Douglas Brereton was co-heir with herself.

Reclosing the strong-box she locked it, folded the will, and began noiselessly to tear the document into fragments. Then holding these, she started up and crossed to the bed.

"Edward," she murmured, "Edward, can you hear me?" The sick man's eyelids lifted, and he smiled faintly at her. Hester held up the torn will.

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"Do you know what this is?" she whispered harshly. "It is your will—the will by which you made your son—whom you love more than me—a rich man. Well, I have destroyed it, you understand, destroyed it! Make another if you like—if you can!"

A ghastly change came into the drawn, white face on the pillow, a look of confused horror and incredulity.

"Hester, Hester!" said the pale lips, in a voice like the ghost of speech, "oh, my mad, my reckless darling, you——"

The sick man's shoulders moved as though he were trying to rise. A spasm shook him, the livid white of his face became a terrible ashen grey, a strange sound shook his throat, and he lay still.

There was a quick step and someone bent over him—it was the young nurse, and she turned an alarmed, condemning face on Hester.

"Madam! madam!" she cried, "why are you here? You have killed him. Go! go! send someone for the doctor, quickly."

Hester quailed before her stern gesture, and, hastily secreting the fragments of the will in her own pocket, swept from the room with well-affected excitement.

The nurse raised the nerveless form of her patient and tried to pour some brandy between the cold lips. She made a despairing gesture and set down the glass. "Too late," she murmured, "his blood is on her head."

CHAPTER II.

"I am on my Defence, then."

"Have the goodness to ascertain if Mrs. Brereton can see me for a few minutes."

Sir James Jardine made the request. He stood in the hall of the silent house to which, only a few hours before, he had been called in hot haste to find his friend and patient dead of heart-failure, and Hester Brereton in apparent hysterics. A night had passed and another heavy November day brooded over the metropolis and sent its foggy breath into the room where Edward Brereton lay in his last sleep.

The footman ushered the physician into a large and darkened library, and went to make the indicated inquiry. The visitor put down his hat, crossed to the window, and peered out through the drawn blinds. On the opposite side of the way, two men and a woman were strolling to and fro—the latter was the young hospital nurse, Winifred Carr. One of her companions was Douglas Brereton, the other a short, stout, smartly-dressed man in a furred overcoat. Sir James tapped lightly at the pane and the three glanced significantly in his direction.

A sound made the physician turn about hastily. Mrs. Brereton herself had just entered the apartment—she walked with affected unsteadiness and carried a jewelled smelling-bottle.

"Ah, Sir James," she said, "so you have come to see me. How good of you. I am better to-day, though sadly shaken. Oh, if I had only taken your warning, my darling Edward might be alive now. It is that thought which is killing me." And she sank into a chair and hid her face in her hands.

Sir James approached her quietly. "Don't distress yourself by recalling the past," he advised her; "by the way, you should have kept one of the nurses with you until your nerves recover their balance somewhat. That little Nurse Carr is most gentle and capable."

Mrs. Brereton put her smelling-bottle to her nostrils. "I—I couldn't bear to see her again," the physician was told; "she reminded me too vividly of that awful moment, so I allowed her to go at once."

Sir James would have spoken, but his observation was prevented. The footman had re-entered with a card. Mrs. Brereton looked at it—it was inscribed "Robert Osler," On a corner was the one word, "Urgent."

"You will excuse me, Sir James," said Hester, showing him the card, "Mr. Osler is my poor husband's solicitor."

The physician had been watching her covertly. "By all means," he answered. "Osler and I are more than acquaintances, I will take the liberty of warning him not to tax you unduly."

Mrs. Brereton made no comment upon the proposal and Sir James lingered persistently. Suddenly there appeared in the room a small stout man with a furred coat—it was he whom the physician had seen walking on the other side of the way. He came deferentially across the floor, hat in hand.

"So sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Brereton," he began, "a terrible time for you, I am sure. Ah, Sir James, you here! But then Mrs. Brereton is in careful hands, I know. I can guess what you are going to say, that she must not be troubled with business—she shall not. All I wish is to have access to the strong-box in Mr. Brereton's bedroom. He sent me a line before undergoing this—alas, unsuccessful!—operation, to say that, in case of accidents, his will could be found there. He also speaks of inclosing a key which, however, he omitted to do."

Hester Brereton gasped involuntarily and looked at the letter held out by the solicitor—it was the note that had been given to her, sealed, by Winifred Carr, the note that she had opened, read, and thrust into her pocket. She had forgotten all about it from that moment, and here it was, between the lawyer's fingers. How had it come there?

She forced herself to answer collectedly. "I—I will look for the key," she rejoined, "and you can go through the strong-box at your leisure. Sir James will tell you that I am not fit to assist you."

The lawyer bowed sympathetically and hastened to open the door for her. No sooner had she disappeared from the hall than he himself darted out of the library and made for the double doors which led to the street. Scarcely a moment elapsed before he was back again. And with him were Douglas Brereton and Winifred Carr.

Sir James held up a warning finger as they entered. "In there with you," he said, pointing to a recess behind a large screen, "and remember, not a sound till you hear your cue."

Douglas Brereton assented silently and drew to the flap of the screen. There had not been a moment to lose—his stepmother was approaching the threshold of the library. An instant more and she was passing unconsciously within an inch of the hidden couple.

"This is it, I think," she said, giving the solicitor a small key and touching the bell, "you shall be shown upstairs at once. Take Mr. Osler," she bade the servant who answered her summons, "to—to Mr. Brereton's room, and point out to him the cabinet containing the strong-box."

Her voice faltered and broke pathetically at the mention of her husband's name. Hester Brereton was no mean actress, and she felt instinctively that much was at stake. Who had sent that intercepted letter to its destination; who had—who could have dealt her that dangerous blow?

The solicitor followed the footman out of the library, and Sir James, with a great show of professional anxiety, put his dead friend's wife back into her chair, and felt her pulse with delicate, masterful fingers.

"You are in a most over-wrought condition," he informed her; "your pulse is simply galloping. Let me send out for a draught; otherwise you will be prostrate in another hour."

With elaborate slowness he wrote a prescription, rang for the footman, and dispatched it to be made up. Hester chafed inwardly, yet she dared not rebel. Thanks to this tactful series of delays, Sir James was still there when the solicitor came downstairs.

"Mrs. Brereton," said the latter gravely; "a most remarkable state of affairs has arisen.

DON'T FORGET THAT "THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY" STARTS NEXT WEEK.

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am sure, by the way, that I may speak frankly before Sir James—who is a trustee, along with myself, of your husband's will—a will that, in point of fact, is not to be found. There is neither will, nor trace of a will."

"No trace!" said a voice, the voice of Douglas Brereton, "then what is this?" As the question was asked, the screen was flung aside, and Hester saw herself confronted by her step-son. Near him was the woman who had said to her, beside Edward Brereton's deathbed, that she had killed her husband. In her step-son's hand was a scrap of stiff paper, covered with legal script. It was a fragment of the torn will.

Sir James took the scrap of paper. "Mrs. Brereton," he added, "we have adopted this somewhat dramatic means of securing a private consideration of certain grave problems. This nurse—who happens to be your step-son's betrothed—picked up in your husband's room the note which she had seen Mr. Broreton write and inclose, with a key, in an envelope, afterwards delivered to you by her. With it, on the floor, was this piece of paper, containing part of the wording of a will which your husband showed to me only a month ago, and which, according to his letter to Mr. Osler, was to be found in his strong-box. How came that note and this fragment in the room to which you were forbidden access, and which you entered by a circuitous route. Is it not the case that they slipped from your hand or your pocket during that visit which cost your husband his life—a visit made for the purpose of obtaining and destroying a will you feared might cost you dear?"

Hester Brereton faced them dauntlessly. "I am on my defence, then," she said; "so be it, your only witness is a woman whose relation to my disinherited step-son will destroy the weight of any false evidence you may have drilled her in. As matters stand, I am my husband's sole heir—no doubt he himself destroyed the will of which you speak."

"And by which," put in the solicitor; "you were left unconditionally half his fortune. The will still in my possession, and which the destruction of this later one brings into operation, was made two months ago after my client had determined to reinstate Mr. Douglas Brereton in his rightful position, and leaves you only a life annuity of a thousand a year, provided that you never re-marry. It was this last document which my client wished me to destroy as cruel and inhuman. His death renders it illegal for me to do so, and, in the absence of the later will, the document in question becomes his last and effective testament. Under it Mr. Brereton is master of this house, and of his father's fortune."

Hester put her hand to her throat, gasped, tried to speak, and fell fainting into the physician's arms. The trap which her own selfishness and avarice had set and baited had closed upon her.

* * * * *

By law, had the courts been satisfied with the evidence of Douglas Brereton and Winifred Carr, and the singularly preserved document, picked up by the latter in her patient's room and carried by her to her lover, who had taken them, forthwith to Sir James and Mr. Osler, Mrs. Brereton's theft of her husband's will could have earned her penal servitude for a term of years, if not for life. But Sir James and the discreet solicitor kept their dead friend's honour from that stain, and Hester still draws her thousand a year and lives, condemned by her own deed, to perpetual widowhood.

Douglas and his wife are worthier stewards of his father's fortune than she would have been. Well for them that they do not dream of the still darker crime that Hester Brereton committed, when she stung, with those envenomed words, the weak heart of a sick man, and slew him as certainly as if she had buried a knife in his bosom.

R. Norman Silver.

Tottie (aged five): "I wonder why babies is always born in de night time." Lottie (aged seven, a little wiser): "Don't you know? It's cos' they wants to make sure of findin' their mothers at home."

Is Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

December 2.—The next twelve months will be rather favourable for those whose birthdays fall here. Go quietly and have a care against chills and colds.

Girls will have some anxiety over love affairs.

The day is not promising for marriage, pleasure, asking favours, nor entering upon new undertakings.

A child born to-day will be rather moody and suspicious; should keep in the employ of others.

December 3.—An active and favourable time for business and finances. More than usual movement, doctors, military men, and metal workers are benefited.

Young girls will find the opposite sex rather backward this year.

The day is good for most matters; buy and sell.

A child born here will be active, courageous, and ambitious; would do well in the Army, or as a chemist.

December 4.—Some sickness and trouble in the domestic circle are threatened. Be prudent and cautious in business.

Love affairs will not go well, and girls meet with disappointment.

The day is evil for marriage, asking favours, dealing with landlords for property. Beware of colds and loss in business.

A child born to-day will be unfortunate, over cautious, and ill-tempered. Worse for a girl.

December 5.—A good year for business and general concerns. Sign papers and speculate. Insure against fire and accident.

Girls will find love affairs very interesting; they become engaged or marry.

The day is good for most matters; write letters, buy, sell, ask favours, engage servants, visit, and make new friends.

A child born this day will be active, jovial, and affectionate. Should go into business for itself and will be fortunate.

December 6.—Give careful attention to business and it will prosper. Changes made this year will turn out well.

Young girls will have attentions, but should not place too much confidence in opposite sex. A good year to marry.

The day is good for speculating, dealing with professional people, electricians, and bankers.

A child born to-day will be fortunate and much respected. If a girl she will have a fortunate marriage.

December 7.—A quiet and unimportant birthday. The mind will be inclined to foreign journeys.

Girls will be much interested in news, but little progress is shown in love affairs.

A child born here will be ingenious and cheerful, but will have a very ordinary career.

December 8.—An unfortunate birthday; change, anxiety, ill-health, and business worries. Some bother over news and agreements.

Girls will meet with disappointment, and many crosses and obstacles come into love matters.

The day is one to let others make the first move; beware of deceit and secret enmity.

A child born here will be unfortunate, and should keep in the employ of others. It will be idle, and mix with bad companions.

Asturel.

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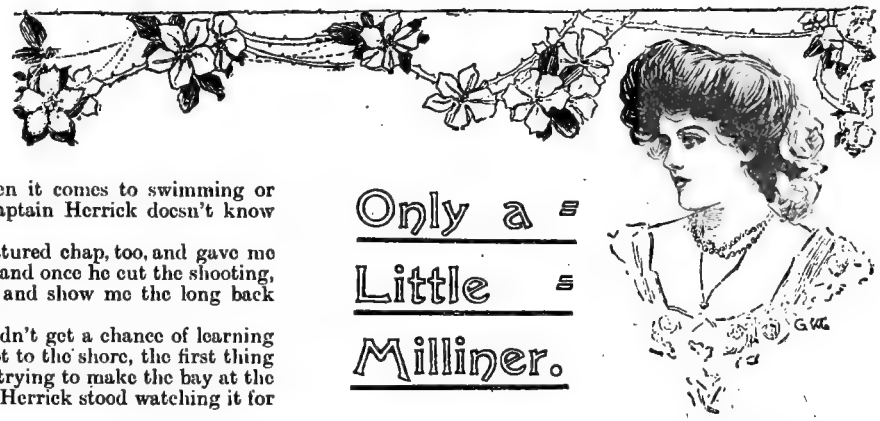

Only a Little Milliner.

I was awfully glad uncle Jack asked Captain Herrick to join us at Blairinch, although he declares he is about as much use on a grouse moor as a bull in a china shop.

That's all rot, of course, because though he is a sailor, he's not at all a bad shot, but when it comes to swimming or handling a boat, well—what Captain Herrick doesn't know isn't worth talking about.

He's such an awfully good natured chap, too, and gave me no end of tips about swimming, and once he cut the shooting, just to come down to the loch and show me the long back stroke.

However, as it happened, I didn't get a chance of learning it that day, because when we got to the shore, the first thing we saw was a small sailing boat trying to make the bay at the other side of the loch. Captain Herrick stood watching it for a couple of minutes then :

"By George," he said, "if the duffers don't take in that sail before they round the point, they'll be upset as sure as a gun!"

Then he whipped out his glass and watched the boat rushing up the loch. Just as she came from under the lee of the hills the wind caught her and she heeled over like a cockle shell. I could see one chap hauling away at the sail, but the second Johnnie seemed to be doing nothing except holding on to the first.

"They're a couple of awful duffers," I was beginning when Captain Herrick interrupted me.

"They're women!" he said, and before you could say knife he'd kicked off his boots, thrown off his coat and waistcoat, and made for the loch.

"Are you sure you can swim across the bay, Reggie?" he shouted as I followed his example.

"Rather," said I; "why, I did twice the distance yesterday."

"Yes, but not in a sou-west wind, and with a sea on like this. However, just keep on the lee side of me and we'll manage all right I daresay," said Captain Herrick.

And manage we did, though I'm bound to say when I heard one of the women give an ear-piercing yell, just as we were half way across the loch, I got such a fright that if it hadn't been for Captain Herrick I should have gone down like a stone.

He swung round in a second and put out his arm.

"Buck up, Reggie, old man," he said, "we'll reach them in another couple of minutes, and they're all right as long as they can make a noise."

All the same I was jolly glad when we got across and found the two women clinging to the bottom of the upturned boat. One of them was a stout old party in a big, mushroom-shaped hat and a waist—the other was a slim young girl, possibly her daughter. The old lady was yelling fit to take your head off. She stopped in the middle of a shriek when she saw Captain Herrick and me swimming towards them.

"Oh, save us! Do save us!" she howled.

"All right, but you must obey orders, please," said Herrick. "Put your arm on my shoulder, so—no, not round my neck or we shall both sink. That's better! Can you swim?" he said, turning to the younger woman.

"Yes, a little."

"Then follow slowly, and Reggie here will give you a hand if you want to rest a bit. We're not far from the shore, and I'll come back presently."

He was off before I'd time to look round and when I did, if I hadn't been in rather a funk about having to look after the girl I should have felt inclined to howl with laughter, he looked so jolly queer swimming away with the fat old lady in the mushroom hat in tow.

The girl was awfully plucky, and though she wasn't a particularly good hand at swimming, she got along somehow, and only caved in once, and then I managed to keep her afloat all right till Captain Herrick swam back to us. I was jolly glad to see him I can tell you, and it was splendid to see the easy way he swam to shore with one arm round the girl who looked like a mermaid with her long black hair floating out behind her.

At least, I thought it was black until it began to dry in the sun, and then it curled up in brown rings and looked ripping.

She must have been a jolly pretty girl, too, for she even managed to look nice with her clothes all dripping wet and her shoes like a couple of wet sponges.

By the time Captain Herrick had finished buttoning the old lady into his dry coat and given her a pretty stiff drink from his flask, I had got the girl into my blazer, but she was most awfully pale, and shivered till her teeth chattered again. Captain Herrick poured some whisky down her throat as if she'd been a baby, but even then she didn't buck up.

If only we had been within a reasonable distance of a peat fire and a cup of hot tea we could have got the women round in no time, but there wasn't a cottage within three miles, and even Captain Herrick wasn't equal to carrying the stout old party so far as that, while as for the girl—I really didn't see what we were to do and I said as much to Captain Herrick.

"Do? Reggie," he said coolly; "why, fetch up the boat to be sure, it's been drifting in shore for the last ten minutes."

As it turned out there wasn't much wrong with her, though it took us a good time to right her and rig up a square sail which we found jammed under the seat in the stern.

The two women had bucked up ever so much, the old one in particular, and when we came back it was to find her scolding the girl for all she was worth.

"But, auntie," the girl said, "you know you wanted particularly to see St. Ronan's Creek, and if you hadn't jumped up and clung to my arm when I was hauling in the sail——"

"Don't talk to me about sails!" snapped the old woman. "I never did approve of your boating, and as for trusting myself again to such a cockle shell——"

Then Captain Herrick chipped in and said that if we were to make the mainland before sunset we'd better start at once.

The old girl was pretty obstinate at first. She began by saying that she wouldn't stir from the spot till a carriage came to fetch her from Craigdorn, and when Captain Herrick explained that as she was at that moment on the Island of Benmuir, a carriage to the mainland was rather out of the question, she rounded on him as though it was his fault.

Then I suggested our fetching a carriage from Blairinch, but when the old girl heard it was three miles away, she asked us how on earth we supposed she was going to wait all that time shivering in her damp clothes.

Then the girl snipped in :

"You know quite well, auntie, dear, that we are going back to Craigdorn in the *Sea Foam*," she said coolly. "You are far too wet to sit here arguing, so the best thing we can do is to start at once."

That settled the matter though it didn't prevent the old lady from grumbling the whole way back to Craigdorn.

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However, no one paid much attention to her, for to tell the honest truth we had about as much as we could do to manage the boat.

It wasn't until Captain Herrick was helping her into a fly at the head of Craigdorn Pier that the old girl remembered to thank him.

"You must forgive my being so ungracious, Captain Herrick," she said, "but the prospect of rheumatism is apt to make us old folk rather cranky and——"

Of course Herrick said she was as sweet-tempered as an angel, or words to that effect, and when she asked us if we would look in and have tea with them one day, Captain Herrick accepted like a shot.

"I ought to have a card somewhere, if I can only find my purse," she said.

"Ah, here it is!" producing a rather pulpy-looking red leather bag and handing Captain Herrick a very damp piece of pasteboard.

"You won't forget that we are at home most afternoons from five to six," she said.

"No, I shall certainly not forget," Herrick said, looking straight at the girl, who for some reason or other blushed right up to her pretty eyes.

It was not until the carriage was out of sight that he looked at the card in his hand.

"Miss Merryweather, Milliner and Ladies' Outfitter, 49 High Street, Craigdorn," he read.

Then he turned to me. "Was that the address you gave the cabman just now, Reggie?" he said.

I nodded. "But I don't believe the girl is a milliner, all the same," I said.

"Why not?" said Captain Herrick. "Plenty of ladies go in for that sort of thing nowadays, and besides, it doesn't make a scrap of difference to the fact that the younger Miss Merryweather is an extremely nice girl, and about as keen a sportswoman as they make them.

"Why, she landed a three pounder in the stream at Craigdorn only last week and she——"

"Oh, she fishes at Craigdorn, does she?" said I.

"Of course, why not?" said Captain Herrick sharply.

"Only that she'd better not let Lord Craigdorn catch her at it," said I; "he's awfully down on poachers."

* * * * *

A couple of days later when I heard Captain Herrick ask Uncle Jack if he might take the cutter as he was going across to Craigdorn, I smelt a rat.

"Do you mind my coming with you, sir?" I said; "at least, if you are going to call upon Miss Merryweather."

Captain Herrick looked rather sick for a minute, then he laughed.

"You certainly were included in the invitation, Reggie," he said, "so come along."

As we flew across the bay in the cutter I thought of what Captain Herrick's mater would say if she knew he was going to have tea in the back parlour of a shop in Craigdorn High Street. I've only seen Lady Herrick once, and then she looked at me through a long-handled eyeglass, and told my pater I was really a very pretty little boy.

Of course that was ages ago, but I remember I thought it rather cheeky of her to call me a little boy when I'd just got into the second footer team at St. Olave's. Sir James Herrick had a ripping place in Worcestershire, but, of course, that went to the eldest son, and they say Lady Herrick had made up her mind that Rupert—that's Captain Herrick, you know—had got to marry an heiress by hook or by crook.

Of course, marrying a woman for her money is a caddish thing to do anyway, so Captain Herrick wasn't likely to be taking any, and I expect he jolly well told his mater so.

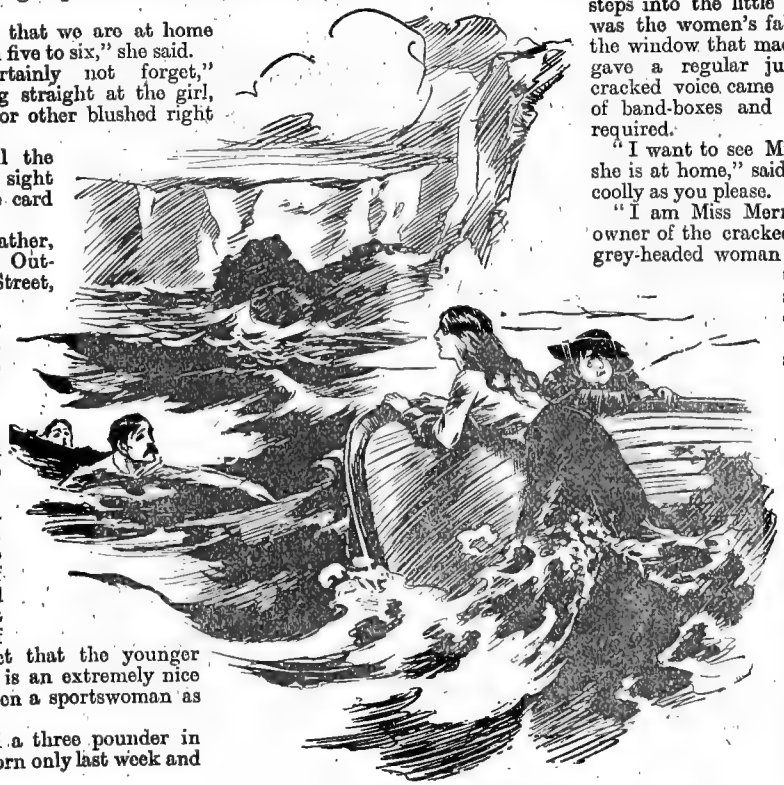
We got to Craigdorn just on five o'clock, and to see the way Captain Herrick strode up the High Street you would have thought he was in a mortal funk of being late.

When he came to No. 49 he had to stoop his head under the low doorway, and even then he nearly went a header down two steps into the little shop. I suppose it was the women's fal lals hanging across the window that made it so dark, but I gave a regular jump when a little cracked voice came from behind a pile of band-boxes and asked us what we required.

"I want to see Miss Merryweather if she is at home," said Captain Herrick as coolly as you please.

"I am Miss Merryweather," said the owner of the cracked voice, and a little grey-headed woman came from behind the boxes and stood smiling at us over the counter.

I've often wondered since how he did it, but Captain Herrick never turned a hair, only pretended he had come in to get some gloves for his mater, and felt sure he could rely on Miss Merryweather's taste to select them for him. He bought six pairs, and though he led the conversation round to old ladies with mushroom-shaped hats and young ones with auburn hair and brown eyes, we came out of the dark little shop as wise as we went in.



The two women were clinging helplessly to an upturned boat.

Captain Herrick hardly said a word the whole way back to Blairinch, and when we met the butler in the hall and heard Uncle Jack had visitors, we were just making tracks for the gunroom when we heard the sound of a girl's low laugh.

Captain Herrick stopped a moment as if he'd been shot, and then marched straight into the drawing-room.

I followed and was just in time to hear Uncle Jack say:

"Miss Seaton, may I introduce my friend, Captain Herrick, Lord Craigdorn, I think you have already met."

To see the cool way Captain Herrick shook hands with the girl, and then explained to her father that he had already had the pleasure of meeting his daughter, you would have thought that he'd known all along who the girl was.

I must say clothes do make a difference even to a pretty girl as you would jolly well have said if you'd seen Miss Seaton in the ripping white frock she wore that afternoon.

Lord Craigdorn was a handsome old Johnnie, too, and a very decent sort if he hadn't jawed away about Captain Her-

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rick's and my heroism in saving his sister's and his only daughter's life.

I asked how the old lady was just by way of putting a stopper on, and he said she was pretty fit only suffering from a slight attack of rheumatism which prevented her leaving the house.

She hoped, however, to see us all at the Castle for a few days if Uncle Jack would arrange it.

As a matter of fact Uncle Jack couldn't—at least, not for himself—he'd got a lot more chaps coming up for the shooting.

So it ended by Captain Herrick and I going to Craigdorn Castle by ourselves, and, by George! we did have a ripping time with the trout!

At least, I did. Captain Herrick might have caught no end only he was busy teaching Mary Seaton a new cast with a special kind of fly. At least, that is what they said they'd been doing when they came in late for tea two afternoons running. All I can say is that when I came across them on the third day, they didn't look like fishing one bit.

Mary Seaton had on her white frock with a rose in her belt, and Captain Herrick was putting in all he knew to get hold of the rose.

When I came back a couple of hours later I'm jiggered if they weren't in exactly the same place. Captain Herrick was sitting with his back against a tree and Mary Seaton—well, so far as I could make out, she was pretty comfortable leaning against his arm. She held a crumpled card in her hand, and as I passed I heard her say:

"And do you mean to say that it would have made no difference even if I had been the Craigdorn milliner, Rupert?" looking up into his face as she spoke.

"Not a scrap, my darling," he said; "you would have still been the dearest, prettiest and sweetest little girl in the whole world."

I thought of Lady Herrick and smiled.

The girl smiled too as she lifted her head from Captain Herrick's shoulder.

"Rupert," she said, "you are a dear, and I believe I should have fallen in love with you even if——"

She didn't finish the sentence, but that I am bound to say was Captain Herrick's fault.

Morris Coleborn.

"I WONDER what old General X. can see in that odiously made-up Miss W.?" "The old war-horse likes the smell of powder, I fancy."

ADA: "No; Priscilla will never marry unless she finds her ideal." Ida: "What sort of a man is her ideal?" Ada: "A man who will propose."

ETHEL (shuddering): "How the trees moan and sigh to-night!" Bobby (speaking whereof he knows): "Well, I guess you'd moan and sigh, if you were as full of green apples as they are."

HE: "The artists say that five feet four inches is the divine height for woman." His Darling (crossly): "You know I am five feet eight." He (quickly): "You are more than divine, my dear."

FATHER: "I hear, my boy, that you have lately told your mother several falsehoods. This grieves me to the heart. Always tell the truth, even though it may bring suffering upon you. Will you promise me?" Boy: "Yes, father." Father: "Very well. Now go and see who's knocking at the door. If it's the rate collector, say I'm not at home."

MRS. FIZZLETOP has been making an earnest effort to have her son Johnny taught to play the piano. A few days ago Mrs. Fizzletop called upstairs: "Why aren't you practising your piece, Johnny?" "I am." "You are not. You haven't touched the piano in the last half-hour." "I've been practising all the same. Those are pauses in this march, and I am practising them over and over until I know them."

TEN MORE GRAMOPHONES FOR READERS OF "SHORT STORIES."

In order that those of our readers who have not yet managed to secure one of these splendid instruments may still have an opportunity of doing so, we offer ten more of our famous Gramophones this week.

These prizes, as every successful competitor will tell you, are well worth trying for. They reproduce splendidly both the human voice and musical instruments. With each instrument is presented two records, and as a Christmas party entertainer they are hardly to be equalled.

What you have to do to Win a Gramophone.

Construct a sentence the initial letters of each word of which, in their proper order, shall make up the two words ALBERT GATE, the scene of the mystery of which Mr. Louis Tracy tells us in our next number.

Write your sentence in ink in the coupon below, using the initial letters given as the first letters of your words.

A.....	**T**.....
L.....	**G**.....
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Then fill in your name and address, cut out your coupon, and send it to the Competition Editor, *Short Stories*, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., marking the envelope in the top left-hand corner "Albert Gate."

All attempts must reach us not later than first post on Tuesday morning, December 9th.

Result of the "Chaperon Sentence" Competition.

A handsome Gramophone has been awarded to each of the following in the above competition:

Mrs. E. Manning, 85 Beechdale Road, Brixton Hill, S.W.
S. Pavey, 58 West Street, Sittinghourne.
J. G. Bennett, 8 Sidney Street, Grantham
W. May, Harbour Constable, Folkestone Harbour
J. Peake Jnr., The Tannery, Liskeard
J. Brand, 27 Balfern Street, Battersea, S.W.
C. W. Lea, 196 Stockwell Road, S.W.
J. Darke, 16 South View Terrace, Plymouth
H. Baverstock, The Beeches, Bettemoor Road, Shirley, Southampton
T. F. Ingles, Westbury Stores, Westbury Avenue, Wood Green, N.

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THE PRICE OF SILENCE.

The Story of a Man's Love, a Woman's Deception, and a Friend's Devotion.

***

Mr. Chris. Gerrard paid the cabman and ran in almost juvenile fashion up the steps of the hotel without listening to the "Thank you, sir!" of the surprised Jehu. Had Sir Allen Joyce arrived? No? That was a small piece of good fortune, Gerrard thought; he was afraid that he would not be in time to welcome his old friend on his return with his bride.

"I suppose it wasn't extraordinary for him not to say by which route he was coming," mused Gerrard, as he wended his way to the smoking-room. "He was never a man to worry about details, otherwise he would have managed his investments and certain other affairs himself since settling down. As nearly as I can gather from what he does say, he ought to have been here by now. Train late, probably!"

Gerrard sat down in a corner and lighted a cigar. His mind was full of his friend just then. They had been at school together, and had done a good deal of roughing it in the Colonies afterwards. Gerrard had been obliged to give up that life about six years previously, owing to a partial breakdown in health, but Allen Royce had continued the roving career, and, two years ago, had struck a good thing and made money. It is probable, however, that he would have continued his mode of living had he not unexpectedly come into the title and a goodly income.

Gerrard himself had not been fortunate, and for the few years during which he had been separated from his chum he had had some difficulty in making both ends meet. He never allowed Royce to know this, as he did not wish his friend to think that he was "sponging." It was an excess of independence, but Gerrard conceived that it was the proper course.

"And now he is married!" reflected Gerrard. "Who would have thought it, at his age—forty-five! Met his wife, and fell so desperately in love with her that he proposed and was married quietly by special license during a stay in the lake district up North. I am curious to see the woman. Met her near Windermere."

The smoke curled about Gerrard's thoughtful, bronzed face as he puffed slowly and deliberately at his cigar, keeping time with his meditations as it seemed.

"He would be a model husband, he would lavish every care, every attention, on his wife. If the woman actually didn't love him before marriage—which, of course, is an utter impossibility—she would be forced to do so by the manifestations of his love for her. I know Royce's character."

A hand touched his shoulder and he sprang to his feet with—

"Hallo, Allen, old fel—Oh!" he ejaculated, as his eyes fell on the figure confronting him. "It's you, Braxton? I thought it was Sir Allen Royce. I'm waiting for him."

"So am I!" rejoined the other laconically, taking a seat. "Sit down, Gerrard, I've something to say."

"Does Sir Allen expect you?" inquired Gerrard, puzzled

He looked down at Braxton without responding to the invitation to resume his seat.

"No, he doesn't!" was the retort. "And I can't say that he will be pleased to see me, but that is not *my* business. Sit down, man, and listen; you may be able to spare Sir Allen Royce the—well, let us be polite, and say the pleasure of seeing me!"

A cruel, cynical smile played about the lips of Braxton. Gerrard, more perplexed than ever, sat down and waited for the other to speak.

"People would tell you," began Braxton calmly, "that I am one of those individuals who earn their living by the exercise of their wits. In the course of that process I pick up certain bits of information which may, and often do, come handy. In plain language, they put money into my pocket, because the parties interested are willing to pay for the suppression of certain unpleasant facts, which I should consider it my bounden duty to make public if they didn't open their purse strings!"

"You're a blackmailer!" declared Gerrard hotly. He was the soul of integrity himself, and this man's brazen talk was almost intolerable. "What has all that to do with the Baronet?"

"It has to do with his new bride chiefly," observed Braxton entirely unmoved. "Naturally, what affects her, interests him, and he ought to be willing to pay for silence."

"Speak plainly!" demanded Gerrard sternly. "What does it all mean?"

"Sir Allen's wife is a criminal," said Braxton, with a trace of spitefulness in his voice. "She is really the woman who, in various guises and disguises, has been committing those robberies from grand houses, and she is guilty of other offences. She is a beautiful and singularly attractive woman, she ingratiates herself with men and women of position, receives invitations, and jewels and all that sort of thing disappear. As a rule she is not suspected."

It took Gerrard fully two minutes to recover himself sufficiently to make a remark.

"You mean to insinuate that Lady Allen Royce is this adventuress?" he asked with a gasp.

"I don't insinuate anything; I say straight out that she is that woman!" declared Braxton triumphantly. "I have indisputable proof! And I'll tell you more. She is preparing to gather up all the jewels and get all the money—in notes or cash—which she can wheedle out of her present husband, and then"—he lighted a match and blew it out—"she will disappear like that!"

"Supposing your statement to be correct, what is it to do with you?"

"As a matter of justice," returned Braxton evilly, "I have come here to point her out to the police as the woman they want for a case up in Scotland. Unless," he added slowly and significantly, "you will undertake to talk to the Baronet, and persuade him to buy the evidence from me in order to spare a scandal!"

"Never!" cried Gerrard vehemently.

"Then you are no friend, and I must try him myself! I would rather have you do it, because you are supposed to be such chums, but it doesn't matter to me. I expect Sir Allen is here by this time, so I will inquire for him! Good afternoon, Gerrard!"

"Stop!" commanded the latter. "Wait a little; give me time to think! How much do you want?"

"It's worth two thousand pounds!", said Braxton. "Make up your mind quickly, for I'm not going to lose my chances to please you! I'll give you five minutes."

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Gerrard revolved this terrible matter swiftly in his mind. There was more in it than appeared on the surface; it was not merely a question of paying two thousand pounds—that would not be much for Sir Allen—but it was the effect it would have on him to find that the wife of whom he was so fond and so proud, was guilty of many crimes. If anything were done in the way of keeping the affair secret, it must be done without Royce's knowledge, or the blow would be almost as terrible. And Gerrard had not got that sum; he was congratulating himself on a stroke of great good fortune, having realised a profit of one thousand on a transaction which had extended over two years, but that was not enough to satisfy this man. Then, again, the idea of being mixed up in anything wrong went entirely against the conscientious nature of Gerrard; if he bought this man off, it would be equal to becoming an accomplice of Braxton and of the woman herself, assuming that the charges against her were well founded.

Poor Gerrard was torn this way and that, between his desire to help his chum, and his qualms of conscience. He had been overjoyed, on reaching the hotel, at the fact that he would be able to tell Sir Allen that he had made three thousand pounds for him in one deal. Now he could easily say that it was two thousand, and so make up the missing money, and he would willingly give up his own profit in order to save the friend who had more than once risked his own life for Gerrard. The money difficulty could be overcome, but conscience——?

"Time's up!" said Braxton irritably. "Going to do it?"

At that moment the door of the smoking-room was opened by a boy who looked in to see if a certain guest were there. Gerrard, looking through the open door over the boy's head, started as he saw Sir Allen's form pass the opening. By his side was a woman of thirty, tall and graceful, who turned her head slightly towards the open door as she passed. The vision of that face touched Gerrard and he answered Braxton's question with an emphatic "No!"

"That settles it!" said Braxton decisively. He had not seen Sir Allen and his wife go by the door. "I'll go and find the happy pair, and it will also interest Sir Allen to learn that Lady Royce has a husband still living!"

He was gone with that parting shot. As soon as he could collect himself, Gerrard made his way to the room indicated as Sir Allen's. He met Braxton in the corridor. They reached the door almost at the same moment.

"I forbid you to go in!" shouted Gerrard, forgetting himself.

"I shall!" asserted Braxton.

He made as if to rap at the door, but Gerrard intervened, and in an instant the two men were engaged in a tussle outside the room door. In the struggle, they fell against the door, which, a few seconds later was opened by Sir Allen Royce.

"For Heaven's sake!" he cried hoarsely. "Fetch a doctor! My wife is ill and I fear her heart is weak."

He was unmindful of the fact that the men he addressed were struggling together; his own trouble absorbed him. Gerrard and Braxton loosed their grasp on one another and hurriedly followed Sir Allen through the room into the next apartment, where Lady Royce lay on the floor, with an upturned face that told its own story to Gerrard.

The doctor was summoned, but he could simply confirm the opinion already formed by Gerrard. Lady Royce was dead, having succumbed to a heart seizure.

The grief of the bereaved husband was terrible to witness; he flung himself on his knees by the side of the bed on which they had laid the body and kissed the cold hand again and again.

"It is not true! It cannot be!" he moaned. "Come back to me, my darling! Do not leave me alone, without the love of a fellow-creature. I cannot live without you, my wife!" His voice shook with sobs and his whole body appeared to be racked with pain.

The sight was too much for Gerrard; he could not endure to behold the grief of his only friend. He could do nothing to help him, so he withdrew and left Sir Allen alone in his sorrow.

In the hall downstairs he encountered Braxton. It was almost with an air of triumph that he spoke to the blackmailer.

"Braxton, you are a big scoundrel, and it refreshes me to tell you so! But you have missed your game this time!"

"How is that?" sneered Braxton.

"The woman is dead, so you can do nothing, and you must find another victim for the exercise of your wits!" cried Gerrard.

"Come in here!" said Braxton quietly, leading the way into a small waiting room, which was empty. "Now, what does it matter if the woman is dead? The information is true, so it remains good all the same. If the facts become known it will be a terrible scandal, very nearly as bad—aye, perhaps even worse—for Royce. Remember him as we saw him just now. Don't you think he would pay two thousand pounds willingly in order that the truth should not be made known?"

"You brute!" cried Gerrard, amazed at the callous villainy of the man.

"Come, hard words won't mend matters. I want two thousand pounds, and for that I will hand over to you, or anyone else, the proofs I have here and will undertake to say nothing more about the previous history of Lady Royce." He watched Gerrard's face and could divine what was going on in his mind. "Well, is it a bargain? Will you complete this transaction on your own account, for the sake of your friend?"

"Yes, I'll do it!" said Gerrard after a pause. "Come with me and I will arrange it."

They left the hotel for Gerrard's lodgings. He had resolved to sacrifice his money and his sense of truth in order to save his friend. The revelation of the facts would crush Royce; the blow was hard enough for him to bear as it was, but to learn all the truth would probably kill him. The transaction was completed; Gerrard handed over the one thousand belonging to himself, and one thousand of the money he held for Sir Allen, and he received the proofs, which he at once destroyed.

As Gerrard sat alone in his small sitting-room that night he turned it all over in his mind, and found the best explanation for the tragically sudden death of Lady Royce. She had originally intended to dupe Sir Allen and leave him, after having obtained possession of everything of value which it was possible for her to get into her possession. But his great love for her made the execution of the plot almost impossible. She learnt to love him and she yearned to stay with him, but she dreaded discovery. Thus, torn by conflicting sentiments, she had lived through the last few days in a state of the greatest mental anxiety; every day she was preparing to fly with her booty and every day she was wavering and putting off the moment of flight. Gerrard heard from Sir Allen that his wife had become strangely excited after passing through the hall of the hotel, and had concluded that she had recognised Braxton, whom she must have known as the possessor of her secret.

Yes, the inward fight and the fear that she was about to be denounced had so affected a naturally weak heart that syncope had ensued.

When all was over, and Sir Allen was able to think of business, Gerrard handed him the profit made on the investment. Sir Allen did not suspect that it was one thousand pounds short of the actual profit; he was satisfied that the result was fairly good. It was a month later that he discovered that Gerrard had lost his own money "by an unfortunate piece of rash speculation." His generous heart prompted him to offer the sum in gratitude to Gerrard for his kindness during the terrible days of which neither cared to say much, but Gerrard firmly refused. It was part of his own punishment for participating in a lie, as he put it to himself.

Once a year, Sir Allen and Gerrard make a pilgrimage together to a certain grave and when Gerrard sees how great and enduring is the love of Sir Allen for his erring wife, he feels that he is justified in having kept the truth from him.

G. E. Linger.

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True Generosity.

Big Man (turning round): "Can't you see anything?" Little Man (pathetically): "Can't see a streak of the stage." Big Man (sarcastically) "Why, then, I'll tell you what to do. You keep your eye on me and laugh when I do."

The Wife's Paradise.

Mr. Flim: "What is there about these long-haired musicians that attracts you women?" Mrs. Grim: "Just think how easy a long-haired man is to manage."

Her Disappointments.

Miss Sentiment: "Were you ever disappointed in love?" Eligible Widower: "Two and a half times." Miss Sentiment: "Two and a half times?" Eligible Widower: "Yes, twice married and once rejected."

He Expected Too Much.

Harry: "And, dearest, do you think of me all day long?" Dearest: "I did, Harry; but the days are getting longer now, and of course—well, you know that that must make some difference."

Might Have Spared Him That.

"No, George," she muttered, as the miserable youth knelt in a passionate frenzy at her feet, "I can never be yours." "Well, Clara," he answered bitterly, as he rose quickly, "you might at least have told me so before, and saved me from bagging these trousers."

A Stitch in Time.

Sweet Child: "Are you going to be my new papa?" Accepted Suitor: "Yes, my dear child." "Have you got your wig yet?" "Wig? Why, no. I don't need a wig. Why do you ask?" "My other papa always said he was thankful his hair wasn't fastened to him."

Made Himself Eligible.

"Papa," said Miss Bloodblood, "you remember you forbade Mr. Trivvet to call upon me because he worked for a living?" "Yes, I remember." "Well, papa, that objection is now removed. May he call?" "What's happened? Has someone left him a fortune?" "No, papa. He can't find any work to do."

Why He Mourned.

Smith: "What is the matter with you? I never knew you to have the blues so badly." Jones: "I am grieving over the death of my brother." Smith: "I didn't know you loved him so much as all that." Jones: "I didn't either, but the fact is after I had him locked up in an insane asylum he made his will and left me all his property, and now I've got to prove that he wasn't crazy, or his property will go to somebody else."

How Expenses Count Up.

Mr. Downton: "We've got to economise, and that's all there is about it." Mrs. Downton: "Well, you have two men and a boy in your office. A boy should be enough." Mr. Downton: "That shows all you know about business. I can't possibly get along without the boy, can I?" Mrs. Downton: "Certainly not." Mr. Downton: "Of course not. Everybody knows that. Must have a boy to sweep the office, run errands, and do all sorts of odd jobs." Mrs. Downton: "Very true. But the men?" Mr. Downton: "I've got to have the men to watch the boy."

Connected by Marriage.

She: "He is connected with you in some way by marriage, isn't he?" He: "Yes. He married my *fiancée*."

Before and After.

She: "Before we were married you used to call me an angel." He: "And now I wish you were one. Same thing."

A Peculiar Soil.

"I've noticed one thing about widows' weeds," said his reverence. "What's that?" "They rarely interfere with the growth of orange blossoms on the same soil."

A Good Name Lost.

Steele: "Marie Arlington has lost her good name." Sapsmith (hungrily): "Good gracious! What are the particulars?" Steele: "She has married a man by the name of Snooksby."

What Jennie Would Do.

"Jennie," said a young lady, turning away from the mirror, and addressing a companion, "what would you do if you had a moustache on your lip?" "If I liked him, I would keep quiet," was the demure reply.

Out of the Mouth of Babes.

Teacher: "I find only one mistake in your exercise. You have parsed phonograph as a noun of feminine gender. Why did you do that?" "'Cause I thought it was one of the machines that repeats everything you say."

He was Sorry.

Curate: "I hear you broke a chair over your wife's back during a quarrel you had last night." Parishioner: "Yes, sir." Curate: "And aren't you very sorry for what you've done?" Parishioner: "Yes, sir, the chair was as good as new."

Why He Turned Pale.

Wife (with determined air): "I want to see that letter." Husband: "What letter?" "That one you just opened. I know by the handwriting that it is from a woman, and you turned pale when you read it. I will see it! Give it to me, sir." "Here it is. It's your milliner's bill."

Willing to do Either.

An old Black-country collier, whose wife was dead, was very busy at the funeral assisting the eldest son in all the arrangements, and as in those days the corpse was carried by bearers from the house to the grave, the old gentleman, when all was ready to start, sang out to his son: "What bin I to do? Bin I to cry or carry?"

Sarah's Aunt.

"Sarah, this going out incessantly I cannot have; next Sunday you must stay at home." "But, ma'am, I have promised my aunt to spend the afternoon with her." Little Girl (interceding): "Do let her go, mamma. Her aunt has been made a sergeant, and has got a new coat with stripes on it, and a great, long sword."

An Undecided Adornment.

"Angelina," said Edwin, "there is a little question that I have long been wishing to ask you." "Yes?" she said, opening her eyes very wide, and pretending complete ignorance, although confident that she was fully aware of its purport. "I wanted to ask you whether I ought to let my moustache grow or not?" Gulping down her disappointment, she said: "I would let it grow, if it will grow, but I'm afraid it is like you—undecided what to do."

Half the Truth.

Jones had married the prettiest woman in town, and Brown had married the plainest, and thought she was beautiful. One evening they were talking about their respective better halves, and Brown remarked: "I say, Jones, I think you and I married the two prettiest women in town." Jones looked at him in surprise a moment, but he saw he was serious. "Well, he replied cautiously, and with pride, "I suppose you are about half right, old fellow." Brown didn't see the point until he told his wife.

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A FOE IN THE FAMILY

By NOWELL CAY.

Author of "The Presumption of Stanley Hay, M.P."

A Reconciliation

FLORENCE, faint and weary, had been unable to restrain her tears as the train started on the long journey. She could not tell how many more weary hours of loneliness and suspense lay before her, with the prospect still that at the end she might find George too late. The world, brightened for a moment by the kindness of his cousin, had become dark again, and, as soon as she found herself alone in the train, tears had come to her relief, and flowed unrestrainedly.

But they arrested themselves, and fear took the place of her dull despair when she saw the door of her compartment flung suddenly open to admit the figure of her enemy, the girl who had tried to detain her at Pennybrook Hall.

Catherine, for her part, had found her heart completely melted, and her suspicion finally conquered, by the sight of her tears.

"I am afraid that I have made a mistake and been horribly unkind to you, Lady Ilden," she blurted out, breathlessly, as the door was slammed behind her. "But where are you going? This is the wrong train for Ilden Market."

The big, pathetic eyes meeting hers were still full of fear and suspicion, although her apology sounded so genuine. Florence hesitated before replying.

"I am going to Scotland, to Lord Ilden."

"Scotland? But he is not there. He is at the Castle, and you are travelling away from him. Did Percival tell you that he had gone to Scotland?"

"No, Mr. Grant Ilden," said Florence. "I have not spoken to his brother."

"But it was Percival who took you to the station," cried Catherine. "And he told you that he was his brother? Then Cousin George was right, and it must be Percival who is in league with the people who are trying to take his life. And my foolishness almost allowed him to succeed in his plan for keeping you and your husband apart. I wonder whether you can ever forgive me."

The unmistakable evidence of his purpose was all that was needed to make her repentance complete. Percival could not have sent an ally off on a wild good chase to Scotland, and she was full of repentance for the part she had played herself.

It was a fitting punishment that the girl she had treated so unkindly should have difficulty in believing her sudden change genuine. But the fact that they would soon be at another station when she must persuade her companion to leave the train and abandon her useless journey made her bend all her powers to the task.

"You will wonder why I could have been so horrid," she blurted out impulsively, but I was prejudiced when I heard of the marriage. I did not think you could care for my cousin really when you had known him such a little time. I believe that you really do."

"How could I help," said Florence. "I care for him with all my heart, and you will tell me where he is, will you not? You will not deceive me. Forgive me, I feel as though you will not, but I am bewildered. Why should his cousin try to send me away from him?"

"That is what we shall all want to know," said Cathie, "and I think it will help us to solve this horrible mystery that seems hanging over cousin George. But I cannot think how I kept on being prejudiced when I saw you. You were not a bit like the girl I had imagined you. And now you will never like me or trust me."

"I think I do," said Florence, and for answer Cathie put her arms round her neck and kissed her, as she had been longing to do from the moment that she found her in tears.

"And now that we are friends," she said, "I wish you would tell me all that you know about this man Despard. Do you know why he wants to kill your husband?"

Florence's face, which had been aglow with the happiness of feeling that she had really found a friend, clouded suddenly.

While her husband's life was in danger she had no thought to spare for the possible tragedy that would come to her life when she had found him safe. Now it all came back with the question, and she remained silent.

"Cousin George himself thinks that he must have been paid by somebody who wants to clear the way to the title and estates," said Catherine. "Do you think that is so? Is Mr. Despard only the agent of somebody else?"

Florence shook her head.

"No, there is nobody else. It is only that Guy thinks Lord Ilden has injured him."

"Then I am sure that he is wrong," cried Cathie. "I am quite sure that George had never seen this Despard until he began to pursue him. I am sure that he knew nothing whatever about him. And besides, my cousin has never injured anybody. He is the kindest and best man that I know."

"I know that he is," said Florence. "But my friend, Daisy Despard, who has never deceived me, told me as she was dying that Lord Ilden married and deserted her, and would not allow her to tell her brother that they were married even when Guy had to believe that he had done her a greater injury still. I think that it turned her brother's brain. He cared for nobody in the world but his sister."

Catherine was staring incredulously.

"Your friend told you this, and still you are trying to save him from her brother's vengeance?"

"I love him," said Florence simply.

"And besides it is not true, and you know that it cannot be," cried Cathie. "Why, when was this marriage supposed to take place?"

"Early in the summer."

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"Abroad?"

"No, in Yorkshire, at a village called 'Lallerton,' where she lived."

"Then it cannot be true by any possibility, for Lord Ilden has been abroad for a couple of years, and it is barely three months yet since he returned."

The strained look on Lady Ilden's face relaxed a little.

"I knew that it must be a mistake," she said, "although I am sure that poor Daisy Despard did not consciously deceive me. Is it possible that there are two Lord Ildens?"

"No," said Catherine, with a sudden enlightening suspicion; "but there may be somebody who had an object in assuming cousin George's title while he was abroad. But that is for George to inquire into when we have told him all we know. We must lose no time in getting to the Castle, in case Mr. Despard has managed to follow him there. It would be more than ever terrible if he were killed all through a mistake, and for another man's villainy."

She regretted the speech when she saw her companion's face. It was thus that it would end, Florence was saying to herself. Happiness like that which had been given back to her was too great to be enjoyed. She had found her husband all she believed him, only to lose him, and the expression of suffering hopelessness came back to her white, strained face.

Lady Ilden Visits the Castle.

The disappearance of Catherine had passed unnoticed at the Hall in the disturbance of the funeral arrangements.

The body of Rupert Ilden was to be taken to Mordenhale by road for interment on the morrow. His sons, together with Sir Charles Barton, and Jasper Ilden were travelling down later by train.

It was just after the departure of the hearse and an hour or so before the mourners were intending to leave the Hall that a message was brought up to the house from Catherine.

In passing through the station on her way to Ilden Market with Florence she had sent up word to Lady Mary that she was going to the Castle, but hoped to return before night. If she did not, her mother was not to be anxious.

Remembering that Percival would still be at the Hall, Catherine had thought it impolitic to give any further information, and even the easy-going Lady Mary, who had long resigned herself to a considerable amount of independence and unconventionality on her daughter's part, was not a little disturbed by this latest vagary.

"It is not as though Ermyntrude were there," she complained to Mrs. Jasper, as they discussed the message. For the widowed Marchioness of Dalmenay, who had ruled at the Castle during her nephew's absence abroad, had abandoned her post abruptly on hearing of his marriage, and was treating him with a dignified silence of which he was unconscious, from the neighbourhood of Nice.

"Perhaps George is there," suggested Mrs. Jasper, and Lady Mary looked alarmed.

"That would only make her conduct more remarkable. His wife, Percival tells me, has gone back to Sydenham, where they have been staying, it seems, since the marriage. I should wire to her to return at once if Catherine were not so impatient of anything like control, and I suppose she has some purpose in view."

Grant listened to all, but said nothing. He could not understand how Lady Mary could take the news so calmly. But then she had not been a witness of the scene between her daughter and Lady Ilden.

If Catherine could allow her jealousy of the woman who had won Ilden's heart to drive her into an open quarrel, as she appeared to have done, there was no knowing to what lengths her infatuation for her cousin would carry her.

Why should Catherine have gone to the Castle, except to see him, and what would she say when she saw him? If she was in the mood in which she had received his wife, Grant could understand her doing or saying anything; and her mother complacently imagined that she could be left to herself to do as she pleased.

He wandered over the house, tortured by jealous uneasiness. Somebody ought to save Catherine from herself.

The thought became unbearable at last, and he went in search of his brother.

"I shall not be coming down with you," he said. "I shall get down home a little later."

Percival glanced at him furtively, with the suspicion of a man who knows that he has injured another.

"I suppose you are running over to see Murgatroyd, and try to 'pump' him about the will before to-morrow," he said.

Murgatroyd was the family lawyer, and Grant drew himself up.

"No; I can trust the Governor to have acted fairly," he said; but the suggestion left an unpleasant suspicion in his mind, when he had hurried down to the station to catch the next train to Ilden Market.

It had been an understood thing that his mother's small fortune would come to him on his father's death. Before Ilden's return to the Hall he had been wondering whether its possession would justify him in asking the hand even of a rich woman without stigmatising himself as a fortune-hunter.

Percival's suggestion had made him ask himself whether his brother had intrigued to rob him even of that modest competence, but it seemed to him now that it could matter very little whether he found himself able to marry or not, and the question faded out of his mind for want of interest. Money could make no difference to him now that Catherine's infatuation for Ilden had shown itself unaffected by his marriage. Infatuation for such a man too. Despard's attitude had left Grant at least with a complete theory to account for the man's resentment, a theory by which his cousin's character suffered severely. And this was the man whom Catherine was making a hero. She was not worthy of the place he himself had given her in his thoughts.

He had managed to persuade himself that he despised her completely by the time that his tedious railway journey was over, and he found himself approaching the fine old building which the accident of birth had given to Ilden instead of himself. His cousin had everything, he said to himself bitterly. And without effort he had obtained even that which he did not desire. Life was indeed ironical, and the sarcastic lines round the poet's finely-modelled mouth deepened.

The Castle had a forlorn air to-day with all its blinds drawn, and the flag on its tower flying half-mast high.

The open door showed him a hall desolate with white wrappings that covered over furniture and armour as a sign that the family were away.

It was thus that it had given a melancholy welcome to its new mistress an hour earlier, when the two girls had arrived only to be met by the message that killed hope.

Lord Ilden had not reached the Castle nor had any message been received from him.

For Catherine, even more conclusively than for Florence, the fact seemed to prove that George had met with foul play, for Catherine had seen her cousin off on his journey to Ilden Market. She remembered how determined he had shown himself not to give any clue to his wife's whereabouts by joining her.

The two had stared at each other with wild eyes in which each had read in the other's eyes a dread that neither would express.

They had entered the house then to talk hopelessly over what was to be done when each felt that nothing was possible. It was a strange home-coming for the Castle's mistress.

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She seemed strangely dazed, as if stunned by this new disappointment and the cruel lengthening of suspense. It was Catherine who acted, and she was feeling the need of a masculine mind to direct and assist her when she was startled to see through the window the figure of Grant Ilden approaching the house. It seemed an almost miraculous answer to an unexpressed wish, and she hastened out of the room to meet him, her face showing how welcome his arrival was.

The fact that Grant himself was looking anything but amiable did not even reach her consciousness.

"Oh! I am so glad that you have come," she said. "You will tell us what is to be done. I was wishing that you were here. But you have not news of cousin George?"

His solemnity had suddenly suggested a tragic explanation of his visit, and her voice was full of anxious eagerness.

"News of Ilden—no. I imagined that he was here," said Grant, and Cathie's dread that he had come with news of his cousin's death was put to rest.

"I thought he would be," she said, still distracted. "He told me most definitely that he would remain here until the funeral, and he has never come. It is terrible. But you will make inquiries along the line? You will find out what has happened—I feel so helpless?"

Grant was looking bewildered.

"I do not understand," he said coldly. "Did Ilden agree to meet you here."

"No, I should not have come if I had not met his wife," she cried impatiently. And the admission made him furious.

"And is it not enough for you to know that he has a wife?" he asked. And the anger in his voice reached her at last. She drew back staring.

"What do you mean, Grant?"

His indignation burst forth uncontrolled at the question.

"I mean that you are driving me frantic," he said impetuously, "by this mad infatuation for a man who has shown you by his marriage that he does not want your love. Why should everything be laid at his feet while I have nothing? Not that I have ever grudged him any of his advantages. He has wealth, title, and position. I have nothing. But I have never envied him until you made me by giving to him when he did not want it, all that I have so longed for in vain. His marriage has made no difference. Your only thought is of him, and you welcome me only because you think I can bring you together. Never a thought for me when I would have given my life for one kind one. Heaven knows that I would never have spoken if Ilden had wanted your love, but he has chosen another woman and you hate her for it, and are blinded enough to show your hate openly. If Ilden needs protection why did you not let his wife give it to him? Where have you sent her?"

(Ilden begins to see through the plot in next Tuesday's instalment.)

A WOMAN passed down Piccadilly the other day dressed in colours so badly blended as to excite at once the astonishment and the ridicule of the passers-by. "That woman," cried a street urchin, "has been and gone and taken a bath in a rainbow!"

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Your Editor Chats.

NEXT week the first instalment of the serial story, "THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY," will appear in *Short Stories*. As I have already told you, the tale is from the pen of Mr. Louis Tracy, whose works are so well-known to old readers of this paper.

Let me tell you that you have a great treat in store, and that you may safely look forward to a pleasant hour reading the opening chapters.

BEST WISHES TO MADGE MORRIS!

To-day is Miss Madge Morris' wedding-day, and I am sure that all readers will wish her every happiness. She has done good work for this little paper during the six months that she has controlled the "In Confidence" page. I am sure that a number of readers will miss her, but I have found a capable successor in Miss Cynthia Hamilton, who will take up the work which circumstances have compelled Miss Morris to abandon.

Miss Hamilton's experiences in affairs of the heart have been very wide, and, as her judgment is in every way sound, I am sure that those readers who wish for advice of this kind may rely implicitly on what she has to say. There are a number of replies to inquiries answered by Miss Morris before she left, which are already in type, but which have been held over for want of space. These, of course, will appear when there is room.

In the "In Confidence" page this week you will find a few words of farewell from Miss Morris herself upon the occasion of her relinquishing her favourite task of giving help to those in need of it.

OUR CHRISTMAS NUMBER.

In a fortnight's time the Christmas Double Number of *Short Stories* will be in your hands. It will be full of seasonable fiction, every line of which you will thoroughly enjoy. The number will be a double one, and the price will be 2d.

FOR NEXT WEEK.

For my next issue I have had prepared a number of clever little sketches of pretty girls of nearly all nationalities, and these will be used throughout the paper as headings for the stories. They will make a dainty and agreeable variation from the usual headings, and I trust you will like them.

Your Editor.

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LORD MERVYN:

or, "NOT IN THE PEERAGE."

A Wrong Scent.

LAST autumn I was jilted. In the preceding summer I had narrowly escaped bankruptcy, and in the antecedent spring I had been the victim of a gross piece of injustice on the part of a near relation whom I thought would have known better.

The late Mr. Sirius Saturn, F.R.S., the eminent astronomer, was my uncle, and on the death of my father, his younger brother, being childless and a widower, he adopted me, promising my mother, who died shortly afterwards, that I should inherit two-thirds of his large fortune.

The remainder was bequeathed to his sister, then a Mrs. Vernford; and subsequently to her daughter, Beryl Vernford, my cousin, both of whom I had never seen till last year.

My uncle was by nature a very eccentric and irascible man.

He was a staunch old Tory, very proud of his name and pedigree, and therefore when he heard that his sister, who had been left in reduced circumstances by Colonel Vernford, had contracted an alliance with a Mr. Eli Scubbs, a wealthy tallow merchant doing a considerable business in the Levant trade, no one was surprised that he made a codicil depriving her and her daughter of every shilling he had previously left them.

A year before his death he had determined to make one more grand effort to demonstrate the truth of his remarkable opinion respecting the brighter "faculæ" on the sun's disc, and with that view he requested me one morning to prepare his large telescope for observation.

I did so. Elated at the idea of yet convulsing the scientific world by his great and ingenious discovery, the unfortunate man approached the powerful instrument and, receiving my assurance that all was in readiness, applied his eye to the eye-piece.

Alas! he never saw with it again. In the most careless and culpable manner I had omitted to put on the coloured glasses, and the piercing streak of light that met his glance as he gazed through the telescope blinded him for ever.

To describe the old gentleman's rage when his oculist informed him that his right organ of sight was irreparably destroyed would be as painful as it is superfluous.

Suffice it to say that when his will was opened it was discovered that he had fully maintained his character for eccentricity to the last, having added another codicil by which he declared that I was not to inherit his fortune unless I married my cousin Beryl Vernford within a year of the day of his death. Should this condition not be complied with, the estates were to be sold and the proceeds devoted to founding a Hospital for the Relief of Indigent Astronomers.

What was to be done?

Of course the marriage by which I and my cousin were to inherit a fortune was out of the question.

In the first place, Miss Vernford had informed Professor Copernicus, one of the executors, and the only real friend I possessed, that "no consideration should induce her to even see her cousin under such conditions"; whilst her mother added that, "although regretting the flagrant injustice displayed towards her daughter, by which she had been deprived of her rights, she could not wish her to so far forget what was due to her as to consent to such a marriage."

Thus things looked hopeless enough, but it was absolutely necessary that something should be effected, for my position was rapidly becoming altogether untenable.

With the exception of a miserable pittance of eighty pounds a year, I, who had been brought up as heir-apparent to an estate worth five thousand pounds per annum, had no means whatever to live upon.

Being fond of the drama, I determined to try the stage, and for a brief season did the leading business at the "Theatre Royal, Grandborough," where I was known, according to the handbills, as "the great tragedian, Mr. Mervyn Lord."

Ere long, however, I quarrelled with the principal lady, an elderly person with a passionate nature, who complained that I did not really kiss her in the love-scenes, and the result was that I left the establishment. Afterwards I became a tutor, but found that still more unpalatable; and at last I went boldly to the Professor.

"Professor," I said, "what am I to do? This marriage, this iniquitous marriage is not to be thought of. Sooner would I take the oath of celibacy, and, joining some monastic institution, live a life of penance, than enter into the married state on such ignominious terms."

The Professor, who was waggishly inclined, had nothing to suggest except that perhaps I might ultimately be employed as Secretary to the proposed Hospital for the Relief of Indigent Astronomers.

Two months had passed in idleness. Eight trying weeks of impecuniosity and discomfort. I had dragged on a miserable existence in a Bayswater lodging. My former creditors, too, had sought me out, and threatened immediate proceedings.

My position was intolerable. I resolved to call once more on the Professor, and solicit his kind intervention on my behalf. We talked the matter over, and my old friend informed me that my aunt and her daughter were to leave England very shortly to join Mr. Scubbs, who was likely to be detained abroad for some time on business. He strongly urged me to pay them a visit before their departure, and endeavour, if possible, to remove their prejudices.

To this I at first vehemently demurred. Then the Professor drew a harrowing picture of my desperate condition. Then he represented an attractive one of my cousin Beryl. Then I half relented. Then the Professor alluded again to the spectral Hospital for the Relief of Indigent Astronomers, and finally I determined to make one tremendous effort to win a wife and fortune.

My aunt and cousin were stopping for a short time at the quiet seaside town of Beacham; and one fine afternoon in July found me knocking at their door, and feeling very contemptible and cross.

"Mrs. Scubbs in?" I inquired of the landlord, an unfortunate victim of epilepsy, who could scarcely speak.

"Un—no," he replied in a sort of squeak. "She and her daughter, Miss Vernford, have gone to London for a week."

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"Just my luck," I thought, and hurried abruptly from the house, irritated and disappointed.

The attractions of Beacham, where I remained during the week, were limited. Outside the town and on the sea-beach were the remains of an old ruined castle. A notice-board intimated that beyond that point the young idea of Beacham might learn to shoot (with catapults), but that any one found doing so on the town side of it would be prosecuted. Here I used to spend the mornings, filling up the ocean with pebbles and meditating in what variety of nothing I should pass the afternoon.

On one rather windy morning, when I was still quite undecided as to whether I should sleep away the rest of the day on the sofa in the parlour or on the spring mattress in the bedroom, I was considerably surprised and greatly hurt by receiving a violent blow on the ankle from a stone.

"Those horrible catapults again!" I exclaimed, writhing with agony, and looking towards the castle. But, strange to say, in that direction there was no one to be seen. "The young rascal is hiding," I thought; "but I'll be even with him yet."

At this moment there was smothered laughter in my immediate neighbourhood, and, turning sharply round, I beheld a young lady sitting about ten yards off, and almost concealed by a large, brown silk umbrella.

Could it have been she who had committed this unprovoked assault, and was now enjoying the fun behind the shelter of a monster parasol?

I was just about to request that she would select some other target for her practice when the umbrella was partially lifted, and to my intense satisfaction there peeped forth from beneath it the most lovely pair of laughing dark-blue eyes imaginable.

"A pretty girl, by Jove! I wonder if she would care to have a shot at the other ankle," I thought to myself. And now she put down the umbrella altogether, thus displaying her rare beauty more fully. A profusion of dark golden hair, that waved wantonly in the wind, lent all the attraction of a vivid contrast to the spotless health of her fair complexion.

Her delicate neck swathed in down, the small chiselled nose, the short upper lip, all betokened refined origin; whilst the firm, rounded contour of her form, in all the promise of its ante-maturity, claimed attention in spite of the loose, pretty gown she wore.

She glanced at my ankle with a look of quasi-piteous sympathy, and then, with an expression of pseudo-humility, raised her large, long-lashed, good-tempered eyes to mine. One look was sufficient. I was in love with her.

But, nevertheless, my ankle began to pain me considerably, and upon trying to get up I found that I limped awkwardly.

At this moment my fair neighbour again raised her umbrella but no sooner had she done so than I heard a slight scream, and caught sight of the sunshade rolling rapidly down the beach and into the sea.

My first impulse was to rush forward and save it; but my foot was now in that state of incipient inflammation that I scarcely dared to stand up. She was, however, now standing at the waterside, and, stamping her shapely little, high-heeled boot petulantly on the ground, looked round at me with the most pitiable and imploring glance.

I could resist no longer. Martyr-like, I hobbled down as fast as I could, and arrived beside her just as an unusually large breaker burst at our feet. She had time to escape; but I, suffering agony in my ankle, whilst attempting to jump back, fell down in the surf, and was thoroughly immersed.

The umbrella, in the meantime, had receded still farther from the shore, and to my indignation, when I turned round I perceived my young lady sitting calmly on the stones, and apparently convulsed with merriment.

Filled with mortification and dripping all over, I limped out of the water, and expressed my regret that the umbrella was beyond my reach; in return for which remark she gave me what very much resembled a satirical bow, and thanked me for my exertions, expressing a hope that nothing had bitten me in the sea.

This last thrust filled up the cup of my misery. I took my departure, and when upon the parade I turned round in a weak manner to take a farewell look at her, she was in the water herself, and a minute after regained the truant sunshade.

As Beacham in general offered so little in the way of novels to occupy the attention, I naturally pondered much during that long summer afternoon over my adventure in the morning.

In the present instance I found great difficulty in consistently accounting for the conduct of this girl. Most people would have agreed with me in at once pronouncing her a flirt. The throwing of the stone, the prearranged accident with the umbrella, the laughter with which she had greeted my unfortunate performance in the water, though in her service, showed that, and to all appearance sufficiently.

But to me it was not conclusive. Would such an extremely pretty girl find it requisite, even if she desired a flirtation, to have recourse to such commonplace tricks? At any rate, if she was a flirt, pure and simple, she had acted the part to the life. And yet facts are stubborn things, and the fact undoubtedly remained, that she had derived considerable amusement from the success which had attended her effort to attract my attention, and to play off upon me a wilfully reckless practical joke.

The next day, about the same time, I wended my way once more towards the old castle. I had, as I had anticipated, been forestalled; she was there already. Slightly inclining her glorious head, she hoped I was none the worse for my immersion of yesterday. I was so pleased at meeting her again so soon, and finding the opportunity ready to my hand of solving the problem as to her real disposition, that I was at first a little off my guard, and by way of saying something observed:

"My misfortune carried its own recompense. It occurred in your service."

To my surprise she only slightly bowed, taking no other notice of the compliment, but asked casually if I was staying long at Beacham. This was hardly the procedure of a flirt, and I was more at sea than ever as to what she really was.

We chatted on general subjects till one o'clock, and at parting she told me her name—Clara Vesey—and asked mine. Cautious I have always been, and I though it best for the present to give my late theatrical designation, Mervyn Lord.

In the evening I met her again. I had now resolved upon a definite course to pursue in my examination of her nature. I intended to try my utmost to detect in her any indications of the propensity she had displayed on the occasion of our first acquaintance. With that view it would be necessary to get up a little flirtation of the so-called non-Platonic kind, and the evening was the fittest period to commence.

"Don't you find this place very dull?" she said, as we sat together on the parade.

"In your society it is little short of Paradise."

Again she ignored my overture. I was determined she should show her real colours.

"You are silent."

"Yes," she replied. "I was thinking how pleasant it was to you to save my poor sunshade yesterday."

I would not be put off in that manner.

"The blow on my ankle——" I began.

"Was too much for your gallantry?"

"Not so. In your service it was welcome."

"THE ALBERT CATE MYSTERY" STARTS NEXT WEEK.

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More fair words. She took no notice of them, though.

"It was indeed," I persisted.

A frown passed over her face.

"You are very complimentary," she said at length, a little wearily.

"I detest compliments. What I say I mean. The only danger of labour in your service would be its inevitable enchantment."

I looked at her as I said this; but she did not return my glance. She was gazing rather vacantly at the sea. Of course, with all the beauty, she had ere now tasted the sweets of flattery. I would surprise her with mine. It should be carefully expressed, earnest, artistic. It should be like tribute warm from the heart.

"Such enchantment, I fear, would be short-lived," she said, a little absently, and still gazing seawards.

"The labour also, then."

She was again silent; but the vacant expression was gone. Her eyes had regained their normal look of merriment and mischief.

"Don't you believe, then, in life-long attachments?" I asked.

"Do you?"

"Most certainly."

"Of what description?"

"I believe in an affection which may almost be called adoration, which is as warm in old age as in youth."

She smiled. "That would indeed be glorious. Nor, of course, in such affection would there be any monotony."

At last I thought I was beginning to gain ground; nor did I then notice the satirical tone in which she was speaking, though it afterwards came to my recollection. I thought then she was in earnest, and I replied:

"Exactly. Monotony implies satiety, which adoration knows not."

"Such a love, the same throughout, must of necessity be so pure, so delightfully refined, so exquisitely temperate."

I congratulated myself on the progress I had made that morning, and the more I knew the girl the more I liked her. All my affairs seemed to suddenly grow rose-coloured. I entirely forgot my aunt, my cousin, and the pressing object of my presence in the place. All I began to think of was Clara Vesey. All I cared for was to be continually in her society, and every morning and evening found us together. I did not, however, yet understand her.

Although a remarkable unanimity of opinion had somewhat unaccountably sprung up between us on most points, I sometimes fancied that she was too easily pleased; but afterwards I accounted for this by her natural vivacity, which was ever to me one of her chief charms. We took long walks together along the shore, and arranged that if by any mischance either of us should be prevented keeping our appointment, we would, if possible, leave a note of explanation behind a certain loose stone in the old castle.

Four days had passed since my arrival, and two more must elapse before I need call at my aunt's house; if, indeed, I could bring myself to do so at all now, which, considering the altered state of my feelings, was beginning to be very improbable indeed.

On the morning of the fifth day she was not on the beach. I went into the castle, and in the appointed spot was a neatly-folded slip of paper. It contained these words:

"Dear Mr. Lord,—*I am so very sorry I cannot meet you to-day. I will be on the beach to-morrow at the usual time.—Yours sincerely,* C. V."

It was not until that morning that I was aware how deeply I loved her. It passed wearily and slowly. I could not walk. I tried vainly to sleep. I could only lie upon the beach and read and re-read her letter. The temptation was too strong for me. I determined to make an avowal to her of my sincere passion, if she gave me only the scantiest encouragement. I would ask her hand in marriage, tell her my circumstances, suggest a cottage, and, of course, furnish it with love.

"THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY."
By Louis Tracy.
Starts next week.

When I met her she was in unusually high spirits. If possible, a brighter fire burnt in her deep blue eyes, a more mischievous smile dimpled her velvet cheek, and displayed the even rows of pearly enamel which lay behind her crescent lips. I clasped her hand with fervour.

"Oh! I am so glad to see you," I said. "I have been, really, so lonely!"

We sat down. There was silence.

"Do you find no pleasures in solitude?" she said presently, in a perfectly unconcerned manner.

This was but slight encouragement, and apparently she felt it was rather a disdainful reply to my exuberant salutation, for, though with an effort as if she suddenly remembered something, she turned towards me, and added earnestly:

"I mean—do you not prefer living alone, as a rule?"

"No!" I exclaimed, astonished. "What can have caused you to think so?"

"The mere fact of you doing so."

"But surely circumstances——"

"Are very much of our own making. Very often they are only a test of moral courage."

"What do you mean?"

"Break through them."

"But how?"

"Oh, if necessary by a leap in the dark."

"Your advice sounds desperate," I said.

"Circumstances are so, too, very often. But, seriously, why don't you try it?"

"Try what?"

"Marriage! Why shouldn't you? You're young, hate solitude. Surely the notion of a wife does not frighten you."

My satisfaction was intense at discovering what I imagined was her whimsically veiled confession of reciprocal passion. How little, I thought, did she imagine how prepared I was to avail myself of her advice, and to take a leap in the dark! I looked at her as anxious love will gaze, in hope.

"Oh! if you only knew what frightens me," I said.

"How can I know unless you tell me?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes, please, by all means. This cuff is so tight. Will you unfasten it?"

She gave me her hand—firm little, bold little hand—and its touch sent a thrill through both of mine; and by a natural sympathy, the effect was communicated to my head, and made it the blind slave of my infatuated heart. The solitaire would not be disengaged. Her hand remained in mine. Another ineffectual attempt, and I succeeded. The cuff was undone, and, raising her hand to my lips, I took my reward—a playful box on the ear.

"Too quick, gallant knight. What were you going to tell me?"

"How much I adore you. Darling Clara! hear me while I declare the heartfelt love I bear you. Will you be my wife?"

At first she was not in the slightest moved, and even at the close of my address she only faintly blushed. It was the first time I had seen her do so. It was a favourable symptom. Alas! little did I then realise what was the motive of that blush.

But she did not answer me. Why? I looked at her again anxiously, hopefully expecting that the faint flush of modesty must have deepened into scarlet. Fool that I was! She was unmoved. The crimson had again subsided into the usual roseate hue of health. Her eyes followed the laughing waves, and smiled almost as saucily. I trembled. Could I have been mistaken?

"Do you love me, adore me, worship me?" she said, with radiant eyes.

"My whole soul is yours, angelic Clara—yours entirely!" I exclaimed, quite innocently.

"Have you ever cared for another?"

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"Never! Never!"

She revelled in her victory. I fancied, when I afterwards reflected on her manner, that she had purposely prolonged the scene, desiring that I should taste fully of the intoxicating draught before she dashed it from my lips.

"And your love will always be the same?"

"Always! If I were torn from you this moment, and cruel fate forbade us ever to meet again, your presence would haunt me, your memory be enshrined in my heart as long as existence were mine."

It was finished. She rose, her usual gay, vivacious demeanour unruffled.

"Come to-night at seven," she said.

I kissed her hand. She was gone.

* * * * *

The evening arrived. The clock of St. Peter's Church was striking seven as I slowly wandered down to the castle. It was not a pleasant evening. The sea was covered with a dense vapour. The air was sultry. There was an oppressive stillness. I was there first. How familiar was the scene—the castle, the old notice-board, the wave-worn rocks! A quarter to eight. Strange she is not here, I thought. As the distant clocks chimed the hour of eight, I entered the ruins, and removed the stone. There was a letter. It was this:

"*If you were in earnest this morning, please think no more of me. It should have been evident that we are quite unsuited to each other. When you receive this, I shall have left Beacham for good. Farewell.*—C. V."

Treasure Trove.

Professor Copernicus received me very kindly. He sympathised with me in my misfortunes, and invited me to pay him a visit.

Nevertheless, he censured me strongly for omitting to call a second time at my aunt's house, and observed that he supposed experience alone would avail to put young men on their guard against promiscuous flirtations at the seaside. From my description of her conduct, he considered that the jade was evidently a thoroughly heartless and contemptible coquette. He would advise me to banish her for ever from my thoughts, feeling well assured that she was an innately cruel, reckless woman, utterly devoid of conscience, and a mere type of hundreds of others.

This was doubtless very sensible counsel, but somehow, it did not operate as the Professor wished.

I did not banish her from my thoughts, because I could not; so I moped and fretted, was silent and uncompanionable, lost my appetite, grew a beard, and expressed disbelief in everything, more especially in astronomy.

At this the Professor seemed to really grow alarmed. I required change, he said—change of scene and society. He had an idea to propose to me. It was this—that I should take a voyage to Turkey for the double purpose of benefiting my health, and making observations for him during the approaching egress of Venus retarded by parallax. The idea was welcome. The change of scene would be agreeable. I consented; and before many days had elapsed, I was on board the Mediterranean steamship *Sultan*, bound for the ancient and beautiful city of Mosquehat.

The important city of Mosquehat is most beautifully situated. It was this busy and opulent place we were now rapidly approaching. For some hours glittering pinnacles and gilded crescents had been visible from afar, and about six o'clock in the evening we put off steam just outside the harbour, where, much to our annoyance, we were informed that, owing to an insufficiency of water on the bar, we should have to remain till the morning. The post-office officials, however, came on board and took off the mails in a small boat and the company's agent, who left by the same opportunity, carried with him a list of the passengers for insertion in the *Mosquehat Herald*, an English newspaper published that evening.

The scene was very beautiful, and I remained on deck all night.

There I sat and thought, and whilst I was thinking sleep closed my eyes and I dreamt of what I had been thinking.

A figure of a girl—a well-remembered form—seemed to rise from the blue water, and, coming near me, laid its hand on my shoulder, and said: "I am not what I seemed. You will never comprehend if you don't know human nature. Not cruel, not false." And as she descended again into the waves, echo repeated, "Not cruel!—not false!" And then there was a long stillness, and when I awoke the beautiful scene was gone.

It was daylight. I descended to the saloon. Towards seven o'clock we entered the harbour and anchored about a quarter of a mile from the shore.

Through my cabin window I could see commissionaires of the various hotels crowding forward up the ship's ladder to secure as many of the new arrivals as possible for their respective establishments. Shortly afterwards there was a gentle knock at my door, and a dark-complexioned face, with little black, beady eyes, looked in, saying: "Pardon, monseigneur! I am the representative of the Hotel d'Angleterre! Grand hotel! Superb! Char——"; but at this stage of his oration I firmly closed the door, slipping the bolt into its socket. In the meanwhile the rapping on the door and panels of my cabin recommenced, whilst through the ventilators various cards, lists of criticisms, and approving notices were dexterously inserted in great profusion.

The clamour was tremendous; so, having completed my preparations, I took my modest hand-bag and rug, and, opening the door suddenly, was almost seized in the arms of a magnificent individual in a scarlet coat profusely adorned with gold lace; whilst round his cap, in letters of white on a gold ground, was the impressive inscription, "Grand Seraglio Hotel." I tried to extricate myself from his clutch and made a frantic plunge forward to the staircase, but in vain. He clasped me firmly round the waist, whispering the while all sorts of seductive observations anent the Grand Seraglio and its attractions, with a view to pacifying me.

And now all control over the crowd seemed to be over. As their respective chances of securing esteemed patronage diminished they grew utterly reckless, one struggling violently for my bag, while another would claw hold of my rugs, and a third conceive a violent affection for my umbrella. At the same time a continuous howling was going on, and cries of "Hotel de Mosquehat!" "Grand Hotel de France!" "Hotel Royal!" "Tres-bon!" "Charmant!" were dinned into my ears till deafness nearly supervened.

Resigning myself to the scarlet-coated one, I suggested to him that we should make one more desperate attempt to gain the deck. He graciously assented, and this time we met with more success.

Leaning on the great man's arm, preceded and followed by a mob of chattering stewards, I gradually mounted the companion, and made a kind of triumphal entry on deck. Hurried gently forward past the other passengers by my conductor, I descended the ship's side, the captain politely taking off his cap to me, whilst many of the passengers looked over the bulwarks to see me rowed off in triumph, lounging luxuriously in the special launch of the Grand Seraglio.

At the landing-place a tall, smart man in black, with patent leather shoes, and shiny black hat, which he respectfully lifted as he helped me on shore, was in waiting, and handed me to a carriage and pair, in which I drove off from the midst of a small but admiring crowd to the hotel.

There was clearly some mistake.

As we ascended the grand staircase I noticed that there were many of the visitors in the hotel looking over the marble parapets with, apparently, nothing to do but to gaze at me

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I determined to put things on their proper footing at once: so, having duly surveyed the gorgeous gold-and-white apartments to which I had been conducted, I turned to my sable-clad attendant and inquired the price of the accommodation; but the man, having ushered me in, had closed the door and retired, leaving me alone to muse over my strange reception at Mosquehat.

What could it all mean? Had they mistaken me for somebody else? I took up a newspaper that was lying on the table by the window. It was the *Mosquehat Herald* of the previous evening. I glanced over it, and found the answer to the enigma in the list of passengers by the s.s. *Sultan*. Captain J. W. Arthur, Scotland; Mrs. Mary Baker, London; M. Jules Chatrain, Paris; Baron Diedermann, Frankfort; Lord Mervyn, England; &c., &c.

So they were really under the impression that I was a peer of the United Kingdom. Excellent!

By a ridiculous blunder on the part of a printer, I had received my title and its concomitant advantages. What would the smart man in black say when he heard that Lord Mervyn was, after all, only plain Mr. Mervyn—lord of theatrical celebrity?—for I may here observe that, for certain pressing reasons of a pecuniary nature, the urgency of which had become sufficiently obvious on the eve of my departure from England, I had thought fit for the present to retain my theatrical *nom de guerre*.

It was requisite, however, that the erroneous impression as to my exalted rank should be immediately removed, for, otherwise, it was impossible to say to what perfection in the art of self-development I might not find my hotel bill progressing in the course of my sojourn at the Grand Seraglio.

"The Albert Gate Mystery,"
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At it was, I entertained but very little doubt that the expenses attendant on my princely disembarkation would show in the "note" a close approximation to the cost of the whole passage from London. I started, therefore, for the "Bureau" with a view to clearly explaining matters, when, as I was descending the grand staircase, the head waiter, meeting me, observed in a loud voice, "Your lordship's breakfast will be served in five minutes." Exactly at the same moment a young lady dressed in black passed by. I could scarcely believe my vision. It was—Clara Vesey!

I did not pay my intended visit to the Bureau. The apparition, as if by magic, of the very being whose memory and image had been for a whole month past stamped upon my mind, so startled my nerves that I thought no more for the time of my errand or its object.

I retraced my steps to my room, and pondered over the unexpected occurrence. The whole of the bitter past came crowding back upon my recollection. Each satirical look that her fair face had worn, each ironical remark she had uttered, were engraven in my memory, and returned to plague and humiliate me now.

Above all, I remembered with indignation the expressions of abject devotion I had used to a woman whose encouragement of them had been prompted by a rooted contempt for the infatuated speaker. And now I was near her again! She passed me by like a stranger. She would have none of me. I had afforded her amusement, and she had finished with me. Oh, that I could retaliate! Was the Professor, then, right? Was she indeed "devoid of conscience?" Would that I could yet let her experience such bitter self-abasement as she had inflicted on me.

At last the confusion in my brain began to subside; ideas again became arranged, and a scheme of mingled revenge and discovery suggested itself to me.

The truth was, that, notwithstanding the past, I still had a yearning affection for her, which, weak as it may seem, I would fain have found justified and reciprocated. As may well be inferred, I had thought deeply of her of late; and being of a philosophical and inquiring disposition, I had often tried to explain to myself some of the many inconsistencies in her behaviour during our brief acquaintance, which my close examination of it had revealed to me.

The result of these efforts on my part was to induce me to consider that there might possibly be in the disposition of this girl some intense idiosyncracy prompting her actions towards me, entirely distinct from a tendency to flirtation or reckless trifling. Sentiment, I fancied, floridly or passionately given utterance to, must seem to her nothing short of bathos wilfully misrepresented as pathos. In the formation of this idea, I had been partly influenced by the recollection of many of her looks, actions, and tones of voice—trivial evidence by themselves, but, looked at as a whole and in conjunction with her words, an indispensable element in the correct estimation of her character.

It was after breakfast, as I was strolling through the hotel grounds towards a small grove of cypresses that edged a cliff overhanging the harbour, that I met her again.

She had a book in her hand, and as she passed she raised her eyes to mine and smiled. It was the same ironical, amused expression that had so misled me at Beacham.

She was evidently undecided how to act, for I saw at once that if I had given her the slightest encouragement she would have immediately renewed the acquaintance, but I did not. Beyond a formal bow I made no response to her advances, continuing my walk towards the cypresses. But what was I to think now? What inference did that smile carry with it? I had little difficulty in deciding. It was a tribute paid to my supposed title. Clara Vesey could evidently meditate an alliance with Lord Mervyn, though her nature was utterly "unsuited" to that of Mr. Mervyn Lord.

I lighted a cigar, and ensconced myself in a secluded arbour off the main path.

My design was soon formed. Nobody knew me here, nor was I called upon to disclaim the distinguished rank with which I had been involuntarily credited, until it was directly and openly imputed to me. My plan was, then, to renew the intimacy between myself and Miss Vesey, maintaining, for a few hours, the assumption as to my peerage, and in that character to once more offer her marriage. If she were to accept me without further explanation, I should be satisfied as to her baseness, and revealing who I was, would release her from the compact, and see her no more.

Presently the silence that reigned around was broken by a footfall in the main path close by. It was light, slow, measured. How my heart beat! 'Twas she!

As she hurried along, shutting up the book she had been reading, I saw that she was closely pursued by a tall, stout Italian, about five yards behind her, who, as she was passing the spot where I was concealed, quickened his pace, and was just on the point of clasping her round the waist, when I emerged from the bushes, and offered her my arm.

The clear, deep blue eyes, just a little frightened, looked up so thankfully, and the little hand held so fast to my arm, that I was very much inclined to relinquish all my schemes for testing her character there and then. But, fortunately, I did not, and whilst the obnoxious individual who had been following her slunk off again between the trees, by design on my part and tacit consent on hers, we turned into the bypath leading to the secluded arbour at the edge of the cliff.

"Who was that man?" I asked.

"I don't know. A great stupid who is always making grimaces at me."

"He seemed very anxious to gain your acquaintance."

"Only that he might make a greater idiot of himself."

She looked very pretty. Dressed in black, her costume assisted her beauty by its striking simplicity. She wore a white straw hat, turned back at the edges and bound with a broad black ribbon. The book in her hand was a volume of Swift.

I was not slow in availing myself of the opportunity thus

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afforded me of commencing the application of the design I had so recently formed concerning her.

"I scarcely expected to meet you again so soon," I began.

"We prefer, that is, mamma prefers, the hotel to a private house."

"Excuse me. I did not suppose that I should have found you in either. What I meant was, that I scarcely expected to meet you in Turkey."

"Didn't you know we were here?" she said surprised.

"Certainly not. I am here on business; our meeting is, therefore, quite accidental."

She did not reply, but looked at me as if some sudden discovery had flashed upon her, then turned her eyes towards the harbour with the same look of abstraction which I had often noticed before, fixing them finally on the blue waves. Afterwards her manner was different.

"Do you like this place?" I asked.

"No, I hate this horrid big hotel! Everything is so formal. It is better, though, than May in London."

"Where should you like to live?"

"In Paris or Italy, in the midst of art and brightness. Shall you stay here long?"

"That depends entirely on circumstances," I replied.

"We leave to-morrow for Corfu."

"A pleasant place. You will prefer it to this."

"I suppose you know a good many people here?" she said.

"Not a soul but yourself."

"You will find it very dull, then."

"No," I replied, "like you, I begin to like solitude occasionally."

"You said you hated it at Beacham."

"I said a great many things there which I never meant."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. When we have an object to gain, as I had then, we often say things in our eagerness to obtain it, which, upon reflection, we must at least admit the stupidity of."

She was silent.

"You have done so also at times," I went on, boldly hazarding the accusation.

"I suppose I have," she said.

"I am sure of it, and, therefore, you can scarcely be surprised that I imitated you."

"But I had no object to gain," she retorted.

"Then you were so much the more to blame, since I had one."

She appeared a little disconcerted at this. It was evidently a new aspect of the matter to her.

"What was your object?" she asked, a little saucily; and I could just discern a slight reappearance of the old sarcastic look in her eyes, which she kept fixed on the water. However, I was now on my guard, and she did not find it so easy as before to enjoy an exhibition of sentimental imbecility at my expense.

"My object you are aware of," I said quietly, "as well as the method I employed to accomplish it."

"Did you, then, employ any very extraordinary method?"

"For me, a very extraordinary one,"

She was very interested. I had touched a responsive chord now.

"Is it possible," she was thinking, "that I have mistaken this man?"

I saw her stealing a side-glance at me, though my eyes were fixed straight in front, but I took no notice. Presently she said:

"Pray may I ask why you employed such a method?"

"Because I thought that, with you, it would be most efficacious."

"But you did not know me."

"Precisely. I was mistaken; I judged by appearances."

"What made you think I was sentimental?"

"I did not think you really so."

"What, then?"

"I thought—how erroneously I now know—that you wanted to get up a flirtation. I mean the sort of flirtation

(*Continued on next page.*)

INDIGESTION

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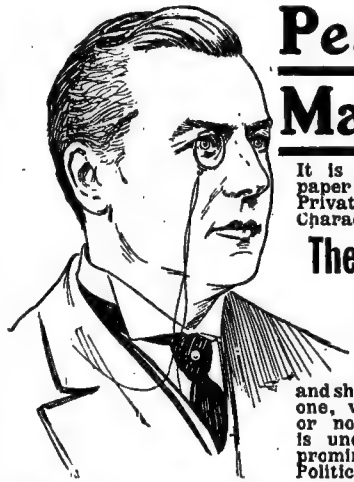

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which consists of unlimited flattery, with a touch of romance, a good sprinkling of wild sentiment, and a dash of honesty, the whole served up by a devoted slave, whose common sense should be nil."

She smiled at this, and the ironical expression and tone of voice entirely vanished. Her real and inner nature was gradually unfolding, slowly proving the accuracy of the hypothesis.

"Why did you fancy I wanted a flirtation?"

"Because you threw that stone at my ankle."

At this remark she fairly laughed, saying, "I never threw it."

"What?"

"It was a boy, with a catapult, in the castle."

This was rather a check for me; but, to gain time, I said, "At all events, it seemed to amuse you very much."

"It did; and it would have done so much more if I had known that you were my Lord Mervyn."

"Why?"

"Because you were sitting there in such a dignified manner, as if the whole world belonged to you. And the absurdity of a little street boy putting all your magnificence to flight would have been so much increased."

She was just now perfectly genuine—enjoying the rare indulgence of airing her favourite ideas; too innocent to perceive that I had detected and was making use of them—only luxuriating in escaping for a time from the necessity of satire and of conforming to conventional opinions.

I determined on a bold step. I wanted to see the effect of a sudden piece of sentiment. In the most tender and languishing manner I could command I said, "I dreamt of you last night."

The genuine look vanished instantly. The soft, natural, happy expression changed immediately to one of cautious amusement. She felt she was back again in a world that was not hers—a world which, for the time, she must pretend to be of, nevertheless, for form's sake.

The outward expression of all this was a desperate attempt to compel her wayward, disobedient eyes to assume a look which they, poor servants of an unreasonable mistress, were utterly unable and unaccustomed to wear. A look, as at Beacham, of deep, soul-subduing passion, which was just about to terminate in the usual merry laugh, when I said, "Such an absurd, fantastic dream!"

Its effect was as if she had suddenly been checkmated.

"Do tell it me!" she said.

"I was on board the steamer, and, the night being beautiful, and the saloon crowded, I slept on deck. Of course there were all the usual accompaniments of the most approved sentimental and romantic pattern: the inevitable floods of pale moonlight——"

"The requisite harmony of the surrounding scene," she put in.

"The undying memory of the fair absentee."

The blue eyes brightened up, and a little ecstatic laugh showed the reality of the amusement which the description gave her.

"Presently," I continued, "instead of sweet sleep incircling me with her taper arm, I——"

"Yes!"

"—I fell into a sound doze. From the depths of ultramarine there rose——"

"To the sound of a fairy chorus, or a German band?" she asked.

"To the first, of course. There rose your form on my enchanted view."

"Was I a pale, transparent shade?"

"You were."

"So that you could see right through me?"

"I could"

"And what did you see?"

"The figures of Romance and Sentiment doing their utmost to encourage you."

"Did I obey them?"

"Of course you did. You forget that I was dreaming."

"Oh, yes! What did I say?"

"You said—let me see, what were the exact words? These ridiculous things soon fade from recollection: 'I am not what I seemed. You will ever comprehend, if you don't know human nature. Not cruel—not false!'"

"Cruel! False! You never thought me that?" she said anxiously.

"You don't seem to remember that all this was a nonsensical dream."

"Yes—I know! But—you dreamt it."

"Of you. That is, it was a distorted image of the mistaken character I had invested you with at Beacham."

"I do not quite understand."

"The explanation is simple. At Beacham I misread you. I had no suspicion that your nature was so allied to mine as it is. I mistook the burlesque for the original, so delicate was your treatment of the character you were playing. In my dream, however, you appeared to me as I had known you then, not as I know you now."

She was satisfied. No other query came from her lips. The intensity of her astonishment at hearing me give utterance to the opinions I had expressed within the last hour—so diametrically opposed to her previous conception of my character—held her in thrall. At the distant sound of a gong announcing one o'clock she rose to go.

"Shall you come out this afternoon?" I asked.

"Yes."

We parted.

I felt now that she was certainly a woman I cared to win, not merely for my own sake, but for hers; because I saw clearly that her nature was of such an uncommon type that few would ever properly understand her.

Now, though it differed in many respects from mine, it yet attracted me immensely, in this, that it seemed more at variance with others. It was a strange combination, and illustrated forcibly the effect which a mistaken system of education—one, at all events, unfitted to her—had exercised upon nature. It was reserved for some close student of human nature to discover beneath the coating of society varnish the precious material of originality. I had discovered it by a strange and bitter experience; though, in rescuing it from the clouds of formality with which it had been so carefully enveloped, I found a task difficult indeed.

I felt, however, inclined to persevere, rejoicing more and more at every new indication of the freshness and innocence which I was convinced lay behind. When I met her in the afternoon, mine was a part hard to play. This, I knew, was to be the crisis of our acquaintance. We were both bent on probing each other's character to the core. One false step on the part of either would be fatal.

I could scarcely resist expressing the most honest admiration of her wondrous beauty. I had to do it, nevertheless. The nature I had to deal with is little sympathised with. The expression of feeling on such a subject had been, moreover, so satiated with flattery, though the reception of it was so unwelcome, that its greatest comfort was to meet with one who would utterly ignore for the time the physical perfection which contained it.

"What used you to do at Beacham after I left?"

She said this so frankly that I could not help looking at her in astonishment. She was decidedly in earnest, evidently quite unconscious that her words might appear heartless or extraordinary. If I had, then, misinterpreted her meaning and had chanced to give the conversation a wrong turn,

(Continued on page 735.)

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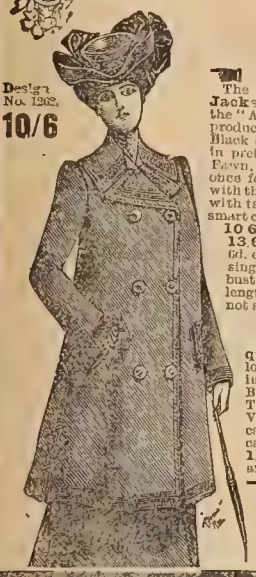

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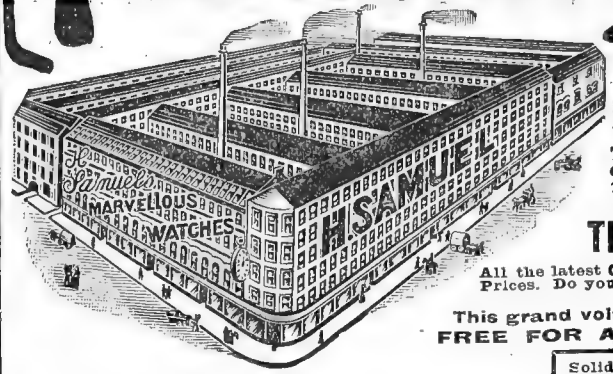

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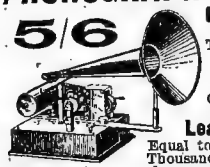

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there would have been another misunderstanding. As it was, I said :

"I used to amuse myself by watching a ridiculously romantic couple making love in the old castle."

"Really ?" she said.

"Most certainly. The lady was tall, dark-eyed, and thirty."

"The gentleman short, red-haired, and twenty, in all probability."

"Near enough. They passed their time in a variety of ways. On one occasion I noticed that they kissed each other deliberately seventeen times in a quarter of an hour."

She laughed a little silvery laugh ; and at this moment a page brought her a telegram.

"No answer," she said, dismissing the boy. "From mamma. We do not leave till Monday. I am so glad."

"Indeed ! I thought you did not like this place ?"

"Nor do I ; but I like to meet a sympathiser whose society is congenial."

"And have I the privilege of being that sympathiser ?"

"I have mistaken you very much," she said.

"But that is all over. I also was in error, but stand corrected. Why should we lose each other's society ? Will you marry me ?"

"Yes."

There was no romance about it of the ordinary and approved kind. I knew she was true ; that she liked me for myself, and I wished heartily that I had not to confess that I was not what I seemed.

Suddenly she said :

"How glad I am you are not a lord !"

"How do you know ?" I exclaimed.

"There is no 'Lord Mervyn.' I looked in the Peerage this morning. I am not angry with you for doubting me. I also have deceived you."

"You ! In what way ?"

"As to my name. It is not Clara Vesey, but Beryl Vernford."

"Beryl Vernford !"

"Yes ! Have you heard it before ?"

"Many times. Know, fair cousin, that Mervyn Lord is a *nom de guerre*. I am no other than——"

"Cousin Geoffrey ?" she cried, amazed.

"Cousin Geoffrey," I replied.

* * * * *

The Hospital for the Relief of Indigent Astronomers has not been built.

F. Percy Monteith.

GERTRUDE (the big sister) : "Maud, I do wish you'd stop your chattering to that dog. Can't you see I'm talking to Mr. Lovedale ?" Maud (aggrieved) : "Well, I've dot a right to talk to my puppy too."

"WHAT are your hopes for the future ?" asked the solemn man. "I have none at present," replied the youth. "To-morrow is my girl's birthday, and I am worrying about the present."

LADY (to housemaid) : "You should take a lesson from the cook. You are slovenly, whereas she washes her face three or four times a day." Housemaid : "No wonder. The fellow who comes here to court her is a chimney-sweep."

"I THOUGHT you said you were going to bring Mr. Browne home to dinner with you," said Mrs. Jones. "He couldn't come," replied Mr. Jones, as he sat down with great satisfaction to the first good dinner he had had a chance to attack for a long time.

MRS. JOHN COX (irritably) : "Here I'm dressed and waiting, with a dress on that cost you nearly £5, and a hat that cost £2 ! I should think you would be anxious to get out and let people see how well your wife is dressed instead of dillydallying in this way. What are you doing ?" Mr. Cox (meekly) : "One moment, dear, I'm trimming my cuffs."

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Must we drag you behind a motor car at sixty miles an hour from Land's End to John o' Groats to make you buy PEARSON'S XMAS 'XTRA ?

NO, we must not ! Fortunately none of these things will be necessary, as you will, of course, buy PEARSON'S XMAS 'XTRA of your own free will, and cheerfully pay your shilling.

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By Madge Morris.

[*In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must in future be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of* Short Stories.]

My Good-bye.

Although you will be reading these lines on my wedding-day, the process of producing *Short Stories* makes it necessary for me to write them ten days before they appear. To-night is a Thursday, and to-morrow I leave the offices of this little paper, alas! for ever. The thought makes me feel just a trifle sad; and if the tears will force themselves into my eyes, they are, at least, not tears of unhappiness—just tears of regret at leaving the good friends I have made during the past year.

❦❦❦

A few readers out of the thousands who have written to me during the time I have controlled this page have questioned the manliness of a man who will allow his sweetheart to work and save money to furnish their new home. I have refrained from touching on this subject up to the present, for it is naturally a very delicate one. But, before I say good-bye to you, I would like to tell those who think hardly of the man who will soon be my husband, that I am one of those girls who prefer to make money and get married to shirking work and remaining single. Jack had some scruples at first about the arrangement I suggested, but he is broad-minded enough to see the folly of objecting on sensitive grounds.

❦❦❦

And now let me, for the last time, thank you all very kindly for having made it possible for me to gain my ambition. Remember, if it hadn't been for *you*, personally and collectively, I could not have done what I have done, for if you hadn't been readers of *Short Stories*, I couldn't have controlled the "In Confidence" page, could I? So, you see, with your penny every week, you have helped to make me the happiest girl in the world.

❦❦❦

The Editor tells me that I have been of great assistance to hundreds of young men and girls in their love troubles, and that I have smoothed out many tangled heart-knots. If so, I am sincerely glad—I can't say more.

Anyway, my heartfelt wish is that the dear little paper you hold in your hand may continue to flourish and grow in popularity. And that *you* and the rest of its readers may always be as happy as I am.

I understand that Miss Cynthia Hamilton is going to conduct this feature in future, and I am sure that she is more capable of the work than I am. We have spent some hours together to-day—I have been putting the reins into her hands, as it were—and I can assure you she is a great authority on affairs of the heart. She has seen more of life than I have, poor little girl, and her experience has been dearly bought. But she is a brave girl, and I heartily wish her success.

And now, dear friends, good-bye, and let me once more thank you a thousand times for your very great kindness to me—a girl whom you have never met.

Madge Morris.

TO MY READERS.

By CYNTHIA.

Miss Morris is, as you already know, leaving this office to get married. The Editor has asked me to take up the control of this page, and I have accepted the offer. I am not entirely a stranger to the majority of readers, and I hope soon to be on still more friendly terms with them.

A few letters have been held over to make room for Miss Morris' good-bye, but they will appear next week.

I am sure that you will all join me in wishing Miss Morris every happiness in her married life—happiness that both she and her husband fully deserve. Cynthia Hamilton.

THIS WEEK'S REPLIES.

Another Case of Deformity.

Nonsense, "H. L." You are quite wrong in supposing it to be your duty to give up your sweetheart, because of your loss of a finger. You have done all your duty in offering to set her free, and as she has definitely replied that she is as much devoted to you as ever, and more so, there is no reason whatever for you to cut yourself off from her. It would be a dreadful state of affairs if the fingers and not the heart governed one's affections. You are a very lucky fellow to have such a staunch sweetheart. Stick to her, and make the best of your little accident. Evidently it is not very serious, seeing what a good hand-writing you manage to secure from a deformed hand.

❦❦❦

Should Cousins Marry?

So, "Relative," you are enamoured of your first-cousin, but both your parents naturally object to such a match. They are, however, wrong in saying it would not be legal. There is no restriction to the marriage of cousins. But, as you must know, such matches are very undesirable indeed, for many reasons. If you are really so fond of your cousin as you say, no counsel will, of course, be of much use. But as a piece of cold advice, I think it would be very much better if you remained simply on terms of intimate friendship with her and dismissed the thought of marriage.

❦❦❦

Bachelors and Christmas Cards.

Thank you, "Cusack," for your congratulations. It is not usual for an unmarried man living with his family to send out Christmas cards. These are nearly always worded as from "Mr. and Mrs. —— and family," in which you would be included. In the case of your own personal friends, there is nothing to prevent your sending out whatever you may like. In the case of the two sisters of your acquaintance living together, to whom you wish to send greeting, if they are living at home I should send the card to the parents, including the girls. If they are not living at home, send the card to both the girls. Of course, you could send a telegram if you think it necessary. There is no law against young men doing so. But it is rather the resource of the lazy and extravagant man, and does not really impress anybody.

❦❦❦

How to Deal with Shyness.

"Laly" is very fond of Bert, but Bert is shy, and shows no signs of returning her affection. She believes he is fond of someone else. Well, "Laly," there is no reason why you should not hint to Bert that you are very fond of him. Perhaps he really likes you, but is afraid to make advances, for fear they should not be returned. There are a lot of men who are too shy to make a start in love-making. Send Bert a nice Christmas card, by way of a start, and give him a few more hints of the same kind. If he is not fond of you he will probably not alter in his manner, in which case you must conclude that he does not return your affection.

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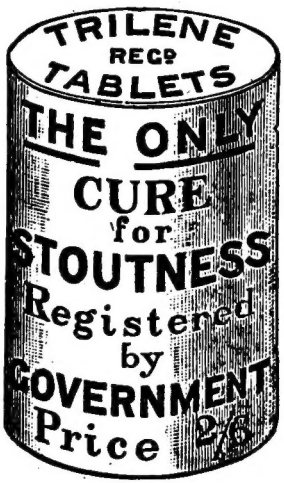

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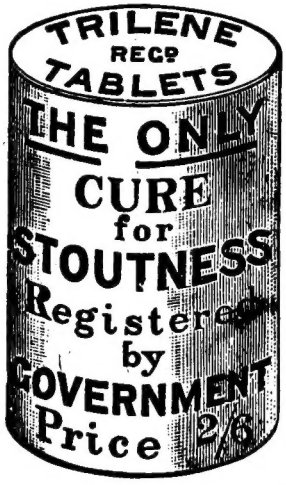

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"67 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

Gentlemen,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them; their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was many years growing so stout, but although the disease was, I consider chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Riseholm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

"West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

Mr. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

Mrs. T. BOSTON, Cambridge Villas, Clifford Street, South Wigston, says: "I congratulate you on your wonderful Tablets. My weight at first starting them was 11st. 7lb., and I now weigh 9st. 11lb."

Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 16lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

Mrs. FENTON, 11 Wood Street, Tyldesley, writes: "Been fat all my life, but now your Tablets tell a tale. I have lost 17lb. already and am delighted."

Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

A. M. PRATT, of Ongar House, Ongar, says: "My weight is so much reduced it is unnecessary to take more. The reduction of weight was from 12st. 6lb. to 10st. 4lb."

Mrs. H. COX, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The box of Tablets has reduced my weight 1½ stones."

Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9½st., and do not get any heavier."

Col.-Sergt. WHITTLE, of East Lancashire Regt., Burnley, Lancs., says: "A man in our regiment in 1891 lost several stone from taking your Tablets."

Mrs. ROLLITT, of North Farm, Letwell, says: "Tablets have done a world of good—reduced 14lb. already without altering diet."

Mrs. W. A. RADFORD, of High Street, New Brinsley, Eastwood, writes: "Before taking Tablets I was 46 inches round waist, now I am 33 inches. I hope soon to be 28. I could hardly move or get up, now I get about easily. Please use this as you wish."

Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

The Princess LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me your excellent Tablets."

Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

Lady C. CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets.

Miss JANE CARTER of Forthampton House, Tewkesbury, says: "The Tablets are of the greatest value. I am reduced many stone, and shall be pleased to recommend them."

Mr. THOS BLAKELY, of 57 The Grove, Bedford, writes: "I have lost a little over 42lb. since taking your Tablets, and my case causes much local interest."

Miss F. L. BALL, 47 Chesterfield Road, St. Andrews, Bristol, writes: "I am quite cured through your Tablets. They improve the figure, and greatly relieve shortness of breath."

Miss PATIENT, of Woodberry, Theydon Bois: "Feel great benefit from Tablets. I have lost 2st., and am sufficiently reduced."

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